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LECTURES AND ESSAYS

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LECTURES

AND

ESSAYS

BY

ALFRED AINGER

IN TWO VOLS.—VOL. I

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PREFACE

WITH these two volumes of *Lectures and Essays* I complete the task laid upon me by Canon Ainger's executors of editing his literary remains; and I take the opportunity afforded by this preface to thank them for allowing me a free hand in the choice of what seemed best to publish, and to express the hope that I have not done my friend's reputation a disservice by printing or reprinting anything that he himself would have preferred to let die.

The greater number of the Essays appeared in the pages of *Macmillan's Magazine.* One of them, bearing the title of "Books and their Uses," was contributed by its author, while still an undergraduate at Cambridge, to the first number of that magazine (Dec. 1859), under the signature of Doubleday (*i.e.* doubled A); and I have included it as a curiosity of literature, because it displays thus early not a few of the preferences, and perhaps a few of the prejudices also, with

which a large circle of friends were presently to become familiar. It opens with a quotation from Charles Lamb and concludes with a paragraph constructed in his manner; there are a few quips, a few praises of the past, a few stout blows struck for Tennyson, a eulogy of Shakspeare (with a recommendation, that sounds oddly at this date, to read Bucknill on the Psychology of that dramatist), and throughout there is a diffused feeling that literature, great as it is, must subserve higher interests. Between this first boyish essay and the short biographical note on Mr. Alexander Macmillan in March 1896, Ainger's final contribution to the magazine, ten articles appeared there from his pen, of which the following is a complete list:—

Jan. 1871. Mr. Dickens's Amateur Theatricals (unsigned).
Feb. 1874. The late Sir George Rose (unsigned).
Jan. 1875. The New Hamlet and his Critics (signed "A Templar").
Oct. 1879. Charles James Mathews (unsigned).
Jan. 1887. The Letters of Charles Lamb.
June 1887. Coleridge's Ode to Wordsworth.
Feb. 1889. Nether Stowey.
Dec. 1889. The Teaching of English Literature.
Nov. 1892. The Death of Tennyson.
Dec. 1894. Poetæ Mediocres.

Of these all but the third, the last, and the merely biographical portion of the paper upon Charles Mathews, are here reprinted; and they are fairly representative of the chief directions in which their author's more secular talent and interest displayed themselves, for they would fall under the three divisions of wit, poetry, and the stage. From contributions to other periodicals I have selected a paper on Mrs. Barbauld which appeared in the *Hampstead Annual* for 1901, and four papers from the *Pilot* (see vol. ii. pp. 127-181).

The greater number of the Lectures in these volumes were delivered at the Royal Institution. Some were given in sets of three: the "Three Stages of Shakspeare's Art" in February 1890; the three lectures on Swift in January 1894; and those upon Cowper, Burns, and Scott in April and May 1898; others were single lectures, "Friday Evening Discourses," their subjects being: "True and False Humour in Literature" (April 5, 1889), "Euphuism, Past and Present" (April 24, 1891), "Children's Books of a Hundred Years Ago" (March 1, 1895), and "The Ethical Element in Shakspeare" (May 23, 1902). It must be confessed that in regard to the publication of most of these Royal Institution lectures the editor has ex-

perienced some qualms of conscience. So sensitive a literary craftsman as Ainger could not fail to make a great difference in style between a lecture written to be listened to, and an essay written to be read. The lectures which he himself sent to press, those upon "The Letters of Charles Lamb,"[1] and "The Teaching of English Literature,"[2] were of the nature of essays, and were written with an eye upon the magazine in which they subsequently appeared; while the altogether charming story of his adventures in Hertfordshire in search of memorials of Charles Lamb, although it was originally given as a lecture,[3] and was not printed until after his death, when it appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* for May 1904, was really not a lecture at all, but a narrative of adventures at Widford; and it may be said, in parenthesis, that there is more of the true Elia flavour about it than about many essays written more consciously upon that inimitable model.

The popular lectures, delivered at the Royal Institution, were creatures of another element. They were written certainly (as the manuscript testifies) in haste, and with little heed

[1] Given at Alderley Edge, Nov. 3, 1886.
[2] Given at University College, Bristol, 1889.
[3] At Streatham Hill, Dec. 6, 1894.

for style, for the sake of the lessons to be taught; and these lessons were impressed by much repetition, and illustrated by much sympathetic reading from the authors discussed. It was clear that an editor, even if he allowed himself the freest use of the blue pencil (and to that I must plead guilty), could not convert the one type of lecture into the other; and so the question presented itself whether their author, so fastidious about his own work, would have suffered them to go to press at all. In that form the question could not be answered. But when I asked whether the lessons enforced in the lectures still needed enforcing, I could not doubt that the answer was yes. Accordingly, with the exception of two courses, upon Tennyson and Chaucer, given respectively in 1893 and 1900, the Royal Institution lectures have been all printed. As some sort of reminder to the reader that what he is reading is a lecture, I have retained a good many of the lecturer's marks of emphasis, in the guise of italics.

I have spoken of these lectures as enforcing lessons, and the description will, I think, be allowed as on the whole a true one. For with all his sensitiveness to beauty of form and expression, Ainger's interest in literature was in the main ethical. He was the product of a time when our

English poets and imaginative writers were largely concerned with ideas, and when critics were largely occupied in discussing the ideas of their authors. He belonged, that is to say, to the era of Tennyson and Browning, of Thackeray and Dickens. Our own age, being less creative, has pushed criticism further into detail, and has confined it within more strictly æsthetic bounds. But Ainger, having the happiness to live in one of the great ages of creative impulse, found his attention necessarily fixed on the larger aspects of literature, and so naturally restricted his attention to these in discussing other great literary periods.

Through all the lectures there runs the insistence upon what Ainger was accustomed to speak of as the genuine *humanity* of the great men of letters. If he is discussing style, he notices how true feeling and earnestness at once raise and clarify it; he defines euphuism as the putting of manner above matter; he finds the root of real humour, and its superiority over mere wit, in its sympathy with, and reverence for, what is human. It is characteristic of his point of view that he should write upon the "ethical element" in Shakspeare (even considering that he had proved Sir John Falstaff to be a "corrupted Lollard");

that he should find more in Swift to censure than to praise, and more in Burns to praise than to censure; and that he should trace the secret of the "Art of Conversation" to certain qualities of the heart rather than of the head. For one who was himself endowed by nature with so much wit, this insistence upon the deeper humanity of the moral nature loses what might else have been reckoned its professional bias, and becomes impressive.

There are two things sometimes looked for in critical essays, which the reader of these pages must be warned at the outset that he will not find. The first is work of research. I do not think Ainger would have claimed to possess any special zeal or skill for the discovery of new facts about the great writers whom he loved and honoured. The confessions in the essay about "Charles Lamb in Hertfordshire" speak for themselves as to his manner of working. He was uninterested in points of minute historical accuracy for their own sake, though when some question touching character was involved, he would take a great deal of pains in an investigation; and I would indicate specially the paper on Coleridge's Dejection Ode as forming an original and important contribution to the study of that poet. The

other element, which the readers of modern critical essays may be disappointed not to find in these volumes, is paradox. It was Ainger's idea that the function of criticism was not to coruscate, but to analyse; to get down to the truth about any matter, not to say brilliant things for the amusement of his audience. And if this older fashion in criticism is allowed, the reader will find many examples of his author's happy skill in appreciating and discriminating what comes up for judgment. The sort of question he liked to put to himself was, What is true humour, and how does it differ from what is false? What is true poetry, and how does it differ from what is second-rate? Why can I read a play of Shakspeare again and again with renewed delight, and never wish to return to the undoubtedly clever scenes of this other playwright? As examples of his skill in analysis, it will suffice to refer to the three lectures upon Shakspeare which open the book; in the first of which I would point to the criticism of *Love's Labour's Lost*, with its careful investigation of what it is that makes the play unpopular, and its vigorous defence of the play's dramatic interest; in the second, to the study of Sensationalism; and in the third, to the searching discussion of Hallam's theory as to what con-

stitutes the common element in the last group of dramas.

I have ventured to append a note here and there; these editorial notes are distinguished from those of the author by being enclosed in square brackets.

H. C. BEECHING.

Little Cloisters,
Westminster Abbey,
June 1905.

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THE THREE STAGES OF SHAKSPEARE'S ART

I

SPRING

(1591–1598)

THE man who sets himself to write critically on Shakspeare's life or works writes with a hundred daggers at his throat! For that life and those works are so full of problems—unsolvable as regards any light ever likely to be thrown upon them—that to attempt any explanation is at once to come into conflict with somebody. And no one but those who have taken part in it, or watched as interested spectators from outside, can form an idea of the earnestness of Shakspearian controversy. But the plan I have proposed to myself stands, for the most part, outside these thorny paths. It will not require the previous settlement of points on which Shakspearian critics so widely differ. It will assume scarcely anything,

I hope, on which they are not agreed. Such questions as the precise order in which the poet wrote the plays that bear his name, or the presence in certain of these plays of some other hand than his, interesting and important questions as they are, will hardly come under notice. I ask nothing from my audience beyond the acquaintance which every educated man and woman is supposed to have with the greatest literary glory of their country.

I am obliged to say "is *supposed* to have," because that general knowledge of Shakspeare that undoubtedly prevails in society is very various in kind. When a great writer has been celebrated, and in vogue, as Shakspeare has been (with a few long and dark intervals), for three hundred years, a considerable familiarity with his plots, characters, and language belongs to the very air that people breathe. Without ever opening Shakspeare's works, it would be possible for any one of ordinary intelligence to know a great deal of the contents of those volumes, so considerable a part of Shakspeare's wisdom and poetry lives about us in habitual quotation. Books and essays deal with him; pictures are painted of his characters and incidents; allusion to him is everywhere, and we cannot escape from it. And then some of his masterpieces in tragedy and comedy are acted at intervals; and if evidence were wanted of what I am alleging—the absence of first-hand acquaintance with the poet—it is furnished by the

remarks that fly about among the audience during these performances—one person expressing a surprise, such as only actual novelty excites; and others expressing a keen desire to know how *Hamlet* or the *Merchant of Venice* is "going to end." And therefore, no one addressing an audience on Shakspeare can quite take for granted that the subject, in its length and breadth, is familiar to his hearers.

Even among those to whom many of Shakspeare's plays are old and loved companions it will be found that others of his plays are much less familiar, and in some cases all but unknown. This is partly due, no doubt, to the circumstance that certain plays are more often acted than others; that, indeed, certain plays are never acted at all. In this country, I mean; for in Germany the whole range of the Shakspearian drama is produced upon the stage, and in consequence the average educated German has a more thorough acquaintance with our poet than the average educated Englishman. And quotation from, and allusion to, Shakspeare is largely dependent on the *publicity* that stage representations give to the Shakspearian drama. But this by no means represents the whole truth of the matter. It is not only because *Love's Labour's Lost* and the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* are less often performed in public than *As You Like It* or *Much Ado about Nothing* that they are less known to the ordinary reader. Nor is it merely that, on the whole, the

two last-named comedies are of greater excellence, of higher quality, than the former. It is, in reality, that they belong to a different stage in the development of Shakspeare's genius. There is a manifest unlikeness between dramas written at different periods of Shakspeare's life, which cannot be described by saying that one play is *better* than another—more beautiful in language, richer in wisdom, more skilful in construction, more exquisite in humour. One play is found to be different from certain of its companions, and the Shakspearian lover, who has known the *Merchant of Venice* from a child, finds upon attempting to thread the labyrinth of *Love's Labour's Lost* that he is in almost another world —so different, at least, is the atmosphere of the one from that of the other. I believe that this difference of atmosphere is, as I have said, literary—belonging to the *form* of the work rather than to its *essence*—but it is not the less disconcerting for that. It is, at all events, what confronts the general reader at the outset of his task, and what in many cases repels him, or at least long delays his further venture into that unknown world. And my object in these lectures is mainly to consider with you the nature and causes of some of these differences.

But assuming that there are many among my audience who have been less attracted to certain plays than to others, I want to show that even the less attractive plays possess, and ought to supply,

a peculiar and compensating interest of their own. Without deviating into points disputed, I want to bring all that we know about Shakspeare's life and art to bear upon this interest. There are one or two dates that should be known to us already, and ready when we want them. We know when Shakspeare was born, and when he died. He was born in 1564, and died in 1616, when little past the flower of life. We know approximately which were his early plays, which his middle plays, and which his later, though we cannot ascertain in what precise year any play was written. But we know as certain that *Love's Labour's Lost* was one of his earliest (if not his very earliest) dramas, that *Hamlet* belongs to the meridian of his powers, that the *Tempest* was one of the very last of his plays. We learn this, not from guesswork, not by theorising, but from contemporary documents and allusions. We also know the fact, with less certainty, of course, from internal evidence, from noticing certain changes in versification and in sentiment—and this kind of evidence becomes more and more convincing as we find certain characteristics pervading *all* Shakspeare's early plays, and others distinguishing all those that are known to be late. And I am not challenging any contradiction that I ever heard of when I speak of certain plays as belonging to what I have called (perhaps over-sentimentally) the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of Shakspeare's creative faculty.

Now the whole period within which these plays of Shakspeare were written is one approximately of twenty-one years—from about 1591 to 1612. It is a period divisible by three, and gives us a convenient arrangement of seven years for our three lectures. I need not say that no space, whether of a nation's development or an individual's, ever falls into exactly symmetrical divisions. There is no magic in the number seven. Geniuses arrange themselves in no leaseholds of seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years, like dwelling-houses. But it so happens that the plays on which we propose to ground our observation of the changes in Shakspeare's literary form and spirit fall within these prescribed limits, and that is enough for us.

I have referred to the fact that the relative popularity of Shakspeare's plays is not merely due to some being more or less poetical than others. It is not that the reader finds *Love's Labour's Lost* a less excellent comedy than the *Merchant of Venice*; but he finds it altogether of another sort, and he resents the difference. Now, our disappointments in literature mainly arise from our approaching the work of an author expecting something which we shall not find there. The young and eager student, whose ear and imagination have come to rejoice in the lyric splendour of Shelley and Tennyson and Browning, approaches the study of Pope, which he is told he ought to admire, and finding it quite unlike

Tennyson and Shelley, is disappointed and even aggrieved. For he has not yet mastered that golden rule expressed in Pope's own couplet—

> A perfect judge will read each work of wit
> With the same spirit that its author writ—

a couplet which expresses quite perfectly the key to all real appreciation of literary value. This rule, then, shall be our guide. I have no such presumptuous intention as that of telling you what to admire *most* and what *least* in Shakspeare's plays, but only to dwell upon the enhanced interest that belongs to every creation of a great master like Shakspeare, when we note its place in his intellectual development, and the influences on him of education or the example of his contemporaries, or the fashion and spirit of the hour.

Let me now, without further preface, very briefly sum up what we know of Shakspeare's circumstances and career before the time that he comes to light in London as a highly successful lyric and narrative poet. Born in 1564, in the heart of one of the loveliest counties of England; the son of a well-to-do, though afterwards less prosperous, farmer or grazier; taught (because there or nowhere) at the grammar-school of Stratford-on-Avon; accustomed as a boy to see the wandering troupes of actors who frequently visited Stratford; apprenticed (at the end of his seven years' schooling) to some craft, though we know not what, whether the farming, the butcher-

ing, or (as Lord Campbell thought) the scrivener's desk; involved in a marriage, while still a boy, with a woman some years his senior; children born to him in 1583 and 1585; and then, by and by, a migration to London, whether or not hastened by the traditional *escapade* among Sir Thomas Lucy's deer. To assume all this, which does not seem much (but is perhaps more than it seems), is hardly to dogmatise, or to be wise above that which is written.

For whatever cause, he left Stratford for London, and alone, while a very young man. And there, with whatever introductions (and the Burbages were a Warwickshire family), he had to face the eternal "bread and cheese" question which controls the early days of all impecunious young men. All known facts, as well as traditional anecdotes, point to a very early association with the stage. The old story of his holding horses at the theatre-door, though likely enough to be widely incorrect in detail, is not valueless. A young, and otherwise untried man, who connects himself with a profession, because his affections and his taste and his talent all draw him thither, must needs, until he has shown what stuff is in him, do very "general utility" business indeed. A man cannot be made a successful actor in a day (though many an amateur has to be rudely awakened from that dream!), nor a successful dramatist. There are at least five years to account for in Shakspeare's

life before he is known to us as a coming power in the art and literature of his day. And though these years are a blank to us—so far as any authentic records of the poet are concerned—they are not all blank if we remember that to make a successful writer for the stage (as contrasted, I mean, with a writer of poems in dramatic form) requires an apprenticeship to the stage, if not as actor, at least as one in constant touch with it or observation of it. It was this that Shakspeare was gaining by continual association with the theatre—whether before or behind the curtain. He served an apprenticeship to the stage, as to the precise nature of which we know nothing. And yet we know this, that his dramas could not have been what they are to us had their author not had this one effectual opportunity of learning what in a play is effective *dramatically*, and what is not. No writer, however endowed with genius, can come into the world possessed of this knowledge. And yet, by a sad perversity, it is one of the last truths accepted by the ardent and impatient genius of young poets. Every young man of imaginative gifts wishes to write a successful play. It is generally his earliest ambition. It looks so easy—given the subject, the poetic gift, the poet's own interest in his work. But, alas! when it comes out of the study on to the stage it is a failure. It will not *act*; nor does it read as if it would act.

And it is this rare but all-important quality

that belongs to the Shakspearian drama as a whole; and far more, I believe, than many persons are aware of, accounts for his supremacy even with those who know him from the book, and little, or not at all, from the stage. We have not much opportunity in England of knowing Shakspeare as a whole (on all sides of him) from the theatre. Only a select few of his plays are ever acted at all. And even when they are thus given, it is generally because of certain leading actors wishing to play leading parts, the remainder of the *dramatis personæ* being left to play themselves anyhow. Some educated persons resent this state of things and abstain from the theatre, and their knowledge of Shakspeare is accordingly derived in chief from the pages of their favourite edition. And perhaps when they are in full enjoyment of the master's poetry, humour, pathos, imagination, wisdom, and matchless gift of characterisation, they imagine that this is *all* they are indebted to; but there is yet something else in the background—or rather above them all—controlling, manipulating, guiding, and restraining all the other great faculties—the dramatist's faculty. It is misleading to speak of that which is effective on the stage and that which is effective "in the closet." The source of the dramatist's effectiveness is the same in both. A play that would have "no chance" upon the stage (as we express it) will have not much better chance with us

sitting in our library. It may be full of poetry and cleverness, and even of a certain kind of interest. But it is not, we feel, a drama.

Experience as an actor and the companion of actors was therefore "making" William Shakspeare in one way. In another way he was being "made" by the building up of plays in conjunction with other men. "Hack-work," no doubt, but of the utmost value. In those days of his apprenticeship to his craft he was employed in adding to, or altering and adapting, the crude productions of men much his inferiors. Some even of his own acknowledged plays bear indisputable marks of the presence up and down of an inferior hand, or hands. By no surer method could he have mastered the secret of dramatic effectiveness, as he watched the effect of experiment after experiment upon audiences, and took to heart his failures and successes alike.

Meantime, by another path, he was training his genius for that of which the dramatic form is after all but the skeleton—he was training his *poetic* gift and bringing it to maturity. In the year 1593 there was published his long narrative poem, *Venus and Adonis*, and in the year following its pendant, the *Rape of Lucrece*. How much earlier than the date of publication these were written we cannot say. But the former poem cannot be earlier than 1589, for in that year had appeared Thomas Lodge's poem, in the same metre, and on another famous

myth of the Greek and Roman world, *Glaucus and Scylla.* The appearance of Lodge's poem suggested to Shakspeare a parallel experiment. But however suggested by its predecessor, Shakspeare's "first heir of his invention" (so he phrased it) bore no sign of imitation, or of that weak echoing of the mannerisms of the original which mark the host of copyists who, in our own day, spring up on the appearance of a new form of art. There is no weakness, no vagueness, in the versification of *Venus and Adonis.* On the contrary, it came to the world, then as now, bearing on its face the indisputable mark of genius, boundless invention, and that evident "unfailingness" of power—the power "of going on and still to be"—the hand as strong at the end as at the beginning, as if it need never leave off—always the sign of imaginative genius of the great, first, order. The stream runs through well-ordered banks, but as it flows it *brims*—infallible proof of a source that is going to supply yet greater and greater things in the future.

It was so that the young Shakspeare, unknown as yet to the general public, save as actor and play-compiler; looked on with something of contempt, if mingled with a dash of apprehensive envy, by the poets and scholars—for he had "small Latin and less Greek"—challenged comparison, at one bold dash, with the poets and wits, and was not discomfited. For the poem at once

was acknowledged a masterpiece, and took a position from which it has never been dislodged. And yet its author little dreamed that in a quite other field his supremacy among poets was to come to him.

And yet by this time he had written at least one masterpiece for the stage, although it did not see the light of print until 1598.[1] I think most critics are agreed in placing *Love's Labour's Lost* as the very earliest of those plays which *as a whole* are Shakspeare's, and have that unity and completeness that follow therefrom. It stands almost alone among Shakspeare's comedies in this respect, that no original or germ of the plot has been found in any contemporary Italian romance or traditional story. But we may be sure that there was something of the sort among the hundreds of such novelettes that were current in Shakspeare's day. It has perished, but we cannot doubt that in some or other chap-book, foreign or native, he had found the story of the King of Navarre and his noble fellow-students.

I believe that to many readers of Shakspeare in England this exquisite comedy is practically unknown; partly, no doubt, because it has hardly ever been acted on a public stage. It is there-

[1] [This first quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* which gives the play as we now have it, was a revised and augmented version; prepared for acting at court in the Christmas festivities of 1597, and very different from the poet's first draft. The reader who desires further information on this and other critical questions arising out of the lecture should consult the prefaces to the plays in Professor Herford's edition (Eversley series).]

fore concerning readers of the play that I speak when I ask why it is that this play on its very surface deters so many. Well, I think it is the very superabundance of its imaginative energy and the prodigality with which it is used. How natural in a young poet just become aware of the vastness of his poetic resources! Wordsworth once said finely of Shakspeare that "he could not have written an epic—he would have died of a plethora of thought"; and we feel that if Shakspeare had begun an epic at this stage of his life, before he had attained the art to manage and to restrain, he might well thus have perished. At this very moment another great poet had given to the world a work in which the same characteristic was found. It was in 1590 that Edmund Spenser published the first three books —the first half—of his *Faery Queene.* And here, too, with all its amazing beauty, invention, and resource, one is aware of a prodigality that at first repels instead of attracting. "Wading through unmown grass" has been an image well invented to describe the reader's experience. But the prodigality of Spenser differs from that of Shakspeare. In the long stretches of description and of detail (often repeated, with slight variation) in the *Faery Queene*, the grass remains the same grass, and the weariness felt is the weariness of *monotony.* Not so in Shakspeare's early plays. The prodigality is that of *quality* rather than *quantity*, of boundless variety rather than sameness. The

food is too rich rather than too abundant, and the consequence is that though *Love's Labour's Lost* is very little longer than the *Merchant of Venice* or *Twelfth Night*, and the plot quite as simple and naturally worked out, it soon impresses the unguarded reader who has omitted to take a guide that he has wandered into a jungle, or into the gorgeous, but pathless, luxuriance of a West Indian forest. The very poetry of the play at first interferes with his enjoyment of it as a drama—an "action." He feels, as the old saying has it, that he cannot somehow "see the wood for the trees." And the reason is, that in these early comedies (and in his one early tragedy) Shakspeare is modulating from a lyrical and narrative poet into a dramatist; or, like a dissolving view, in the transition stage, it is for the moment half one thing and half the other. Not that there is any lack of dramatic sense and experience. There is nothing of crudeness, of inexperience, in the hand which constructed and wrought out this play. The plot; the sense of the importance of "situations"; of the value of "climax"; all these things indeed which make a play effective on the stage, are found in *Love's Labour's Lost* when once our eye is accustomed to the splendour of the setting. And this was so, as we have seen, because the lyric abundance, obvious in *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, was possessed by a man who had also served a long apprenticeship to the stage. Full of the enjoy-

ment of rhythm, rhyme, and metrical device, Shakspeare began applying these to dramatic purposes. Blank verse he uses also—splendid in diction, but monotonous in cadence (for as yet Shakspeare built upon the model of his predecessors and had not learned the sovereign effect of variety of pause)—but ready to deviate at any moment into the rhymed couplet, into stanza, and even into lines of a quite different metrical *ictus*.

The story of *Love's Labour's Lost* is so delightful (when once disentangled from its poetical embroideries) that I could never quite forgive Charles and Mary Lamb, when telling the story of these plays in prose for young people, markedly omitting this comedy—one other reason, by the way, why it is less familiar to the young reader. The King of Navarre, with his three noble friends, Biron, Longaville, and Dumain, in the interests of what is now called "culture," frame for themselves a self-denying ordinance for three years—to devote themselves in retirement to study, and for that space to limit themselves to the severest discipline as to food and drink and sleep, and never to look upon a lady's face. Biron, the humourist among them, has signed his name to this document, somewhat rashly, without fully appreciating all its covenants, but (good fellow as he is) will not desert his friends. What follows, all may anticipate. Man proposes, but woman disposes. The King of France has occasion at this time to send his daughter the princess, with three

charming ladies-in-waiting, Rosaline, Maria, and Katharine, to the King of Navarre, with embassies of peace, there being some outstanding money claims between the parties arising out of past wars. Immediately, it becomes evident (as the late Mr. Artemus Ward used to put it) how much of human nature there is in a man, for all the self-denying ordinances are at once forgotten. Each writes verses to the loved one; and what verses they are! for one copy is no other than the matchless—

> On a day—alack the day!—
> Love, whose month is ever May,
> Spied a blossom passing fair
> Playing in the wanton air:
> Through the velvet leaves the wind,
> All unseen, can passage find;
> That the lover, sick to death,
> Wish himself the heaven's breath.
> Air, quoth he, thy cheeks may blow;
> Air, would I might triumph so!
> But, alack, my hand is sworn
> Ne'er to pluck thee from thy thorn;
> Vow, alack, for youth unmeet,
> Youth so apt to pluck a sweet!
> Do not call it sin in me,
> That I am forsworn for thee;
> Thou for whom Jove would swear
> Juno but an Ethiope were;
> And deny himself for Jove,
> Turning mortal for thy love—

lines, exquisite and immortal wherever read, but how much more exquisite when read in their

first setting, with their dramatic significance and appropriateness clearly present to us. Each, then, as I have said, writes his verses, and Biron, concealed in a leafy oak, overhears them, one by one, and finally discovering himself, rebukes them all, with magnificent effrontery, for this breach of their engagement—when, by a totally different but perfectly natural mischance, his own similar letter to the Lady Rosaline falls into the hands of his friends, and he too is proclaimed defaulter. It is not for me to impose my predilections upon my audience, but I cannot help saying that nowhere else, even in the Shakspearian drama, is there a situation so admirably, yet so simply contrived as this—so effective in climax, so sweet alike in its humour and in its morale; so sumptuous and exhilarating in the strain of the poetry. The poor clown, Costard (worthy peer of Dogberry and Launce), makes his blunder, and transposes the two letters entrusted to him, whereby poor Biron's falls into the hands of his friends. And Biron turns upon Costard, with a moment's fierce anger, and then throws himself upon the indulgence that the others must needs give him. I know nothing more exquisitely imagined and worked out than is this third scene of the fourth act. The situation is most adroitly led up to. The King overhears Dumain and Longaville confess their passion, and rebukes them; meantime Biron, in the tree, has overheard the King; and finally the

blunder of Costard unmasks Biron himself. Biron, so stern critics say, is but an early sketch of Benedick, with a dash of Mercutio in him; but we could not the better spare him for this reason.

I have mentioned the very lavishness of the poetic dialogue as one cause of the play cloying the palate of the casual reader. There remains one other cause, operating towards the same result. Shakspeare took up comedy at the point at which Lyly left it, and he began with a trenchant and brilliant fantasia upon Lyly's manner, despising it out of the depths of his good sense, and yet employing it and adorning it out of the boundless riches of his fancy. The play is at one and the same time a study in what is vaguely called "euphuism"[1] and a mockery of it. The more easily imitable, and therefore more hackneyed literary affectations—verbal trickery, pedantry, use of finer words than the multitude used—are frankly condemned in the person of Armado; but the more poetic capabilities of the fashion —its opportunities for redundancy and efflorescence—these affect the language of the whole play, whoever is the speaker; and to a young poet of illimitable resource of language and fancy formed, no doubt, a strong temptation and a snare, for which he has paid the penalty, for it is as true of Shakspeare himself as it is of Armado, of whom Holofernes said it, that he

[1] [See the lecture upon Euphuism, p. 156.]

sometimes "draws out the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument." And however superbly lovely that verbosity often is, it is the enemy, not the friend, of the dramatic method. Shakspeare had learned the art of making a play (as I have pointed out) in the best of all ways. He had served an apprenticeship to the stage, but as yet he had not learned how to discipline the resources of his poetic invention. This he had to teach himself, or learn for himself, by another experience. Shakspeare probably (may we not say *certainly*?) never thought of posterity, never thought even of his plays being read or criticised outside the walls of the theatre. It suited his purpose to ridicule a fashion, at the same time displaying all its intellectual capabilities, without remembering that a fashion (because it *is* a fashion) passeth away; and that even the ridicule of a fashion may be as ephemeral as the fashion itself. Hence is it that, having no national theatre (not having even what all second-class towns have in Germany), scarcely any of us have tested on the stage the admirable effectiveness of this comedy; and perhaps in consequence we have been disheartened and repelled in the reading from one of the most human and even pathetic of Shakspeare's plays.

Other important plays belonging to this first period are the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, between 1591 and 1593, and *Romeo and Juliet*, 1595 or 1596. Of these I can speak more

briefly, for, owing to stage representations and other reasons, they are familiar to us all. On the internal evidence of style (for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear) they are as manifestly the production of Shakspeare's earliest stage as *Love's Labour's Lost*. The frequency of the rhymed couplet, and even of stanzas diversifying the couplet, and the lyric colouring of the poetry throughout, are in these two other plays also. But already we mark two things: that this exuberance is *more* subdued than in the earlier comedy; and that it is less *felt* by the reader, because of the more abundant incident, and the quicker movement, of the dramas. We go on to notice that as human feeling and passion assert themselves in these plays, and the poet himself is stirred by the "pity of it," even in the dilemmas and cross-purposes of poor Hermia and Helena, rhyme drops off from his style, and the freer blank verse asserts its necessity. Though in *Romeo and Juliet* whole scenes are written in rhyme, yet when it comes to the mighty passion of the pleading between the lovers, or of Juliet's terrible soliloquies, rhyme disappears. We feel—and we see how Shakspeare felt—that though, while the course of true love runs smooth, Friar Laurence may well deliver his fatherly counsel in smooth neat couplets, yet when once the great thoughts, the deep griefs, begin to burst and break through all that is unreal in man, the artificial adjuncts of speech are out of place. While Romeo

is yet luxuriating in his day-dream of Rosaline, we are not offended that he can remonstrate (even in stanza) with his friend Benvolio, who bids him look farther afield :—

> When the devout religion of mine eye
> Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires ;
> And these, who often drown'd could never die,
> Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars !
> One fairer than my love ! the all-seeing sun
> Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun.

But when Romeo appears in Capulet's orchard, beneath Juliet's window, the key of passion has changed, and the key of language has changed with it :—

> O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
> That I might touch that cheek !
> *Juliet.* Ay me !
> *Romeo.* She speaks :
> O, speak again, bright angel ! for thou art
> As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
> As is a winged messenger of heaven
> Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes
> Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him
> When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds
> And sails upon the bosom of the air.

I shall have occasion to say something further on this subject in my next lecture. In the meantime, I must speak of Shakspeare's earliest prose. In both plays I have been discussing, certain portions of dialogue are in prose, and for the most part, like the verse, largely infected with the euphuistic

trick of the current fashion. The puns, and the word-quibbling and straw-splitting in the conversations of Armado with the page, or Romeo with his friends, are due not merely to the circumstance that John Lyly had set the example of writing comedy in prose, and had naturally therefore used the style that he had brought to perfection and given a name to. There was also the contributing fact that the young men of the court and society in Elizabeth's day—the Mercutios and Osrics of actual life whom Shakspeare had met in company of his friend Lord Southampton —were themselves given to use a dialectic jargon, which was in effect the *argot*, the slang, of the hour. It was natural in a writer of comedy, who had yet to make his name, to copy in his prose-speaking characters the idiom of the day. But happily for the development of Shakspeare's power, it fell to him to draw characters of quite other class and breeding than the Osrics and Mercutios, and in providing them with dialogue to discover in himself a faculty in which he leaves contemporaries and predecessors behind him even more rapidly and decisively than in the domain of poetry. Christopher Marlowe had written some superb dramatic blank verse before Shakspeare wrote a play at all. Greene and Peele had each written melodious and flexible verse of fine quality. And all these, in certain scenes of their plays, had short passages of comic dialogue in prose; but of these three men, one (Marlowe) a

genius of all but the first rank, and the others endowed with real poetry and charm, it is not unjust to say that the dialogue of their comic characters never rises above buffoonery. In *Faustus* and the *Tamburlaine* plays—where Marlowe's "mighty line" is at its mightiest—the incidental comic scenes are little more than ribaldry; and, as far as we can discover, this wonderful genius was all but destitute of such humour, at least, as could express itself in *comic characterisation.* And it is this which constitutes another of Shakspeare's immense gifts to us. Before him, the comic characters of the stage were only just emerging from their undoubted germ-type—the *vice* of the miracle and morality play. They came upon the stage, like the vice, "to make pastime," to amuse the "groundlings," who may have begun to tire of the sentimental interest. Already, in plays we have been considering, we have seen how Shakspeare was "drawing away" from this crude idea of a low-comedy personage. The clown Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost* is, like the rest of the characters, more or less tarred with the euphuistic brush; but there is already in him, we may say, an individuality. He is a character, and not merely a clown. And I need not say that the *Midsummer Night's Dream* had clearly enough shown that the comedy of low-life need not in future be but another name for buffoonery, unless indeed (a large exception!) the performer of the character chose to make it so.

But as yet Shakspeare had not shown how he could treat in prose a humorous under-plot of real life, of sustained interest. This opportunity came to him when, towards the close of this first period of his art, he formed out of the traditions of a degenerate gentleman of convivial tastes, living in Plantagenet days, the immortal group of Falstaff and his satellites; each, however slightly sketched, a distinct individuality — no longer brought in, like the "corner" men of a nigger-troupe, to exchange repartee, but flesh and blood—having affections, organs, and senses like ourselves.

In the two parts of *Henry IV.*—written probably in 1597 or 1598—there first comes to view this pre-eminence of Shakspeare over anybody and anything that he then had to model himself upon. And we can see how the extraordinary advance of Shakspeare in his power to compose prose dialogue is really of the same nature and due to the same causes as his advance in poetical dialogue. In both cases conventionality is being driven out by reality. Just as passion and deepest feeling breaks away from rhyme and other metrical limitations, so an actual individuality, though it is an Ancient Pistol or a Mrs. Quickly, makes impossible the time-honoured methods of raising a laugh, and creates from within its true and appropriate utterance, which is humorous just because it is true to life. For all true humour is based upon truth of observation there. Time

fails me to notice Shakspeare's art in the poetical portion of the historical plays, and to point out why in these portions Shakspeare did not break away as obviously from the diction and manner of his contemporaries. As a fact, this is so, and there are many lengths of blank verse (with some brilliant exceptions) in these *Henry IV.* plays which might have been written by another hand than Shakspeare's. Not so, I have said, with the humorous prose portion of these plays. There had been as yet no English writer (whose works have come down to us) who could conceivably have drawn the characters and written the dialogue of the personages gathering round Sir John Falstaff — with the single exception of Chaucer, had the genius of his age called that great humourist to use the dramatic form. Falstaff himself is so stupendous a creation — not one jot less a creation because divers other small dramatists had been already meddling with the traditional personage on which the character was based—that one is ashamed to bring him in at the fag-end of a lecture.

Not the least wonderful thing, many persons probably think, about Shakspeare's wondrous personality is that the author of the Falstaff scenes could also write—had only a year or two before written—the Balcony Scene in *Romeo and Juliet.* I think our wonder as to such things may diminish on deeper reflection. Imagination on the one hand, sympathy and insight on the

other, is the key to both. And as their author had himself not long before told us, the poet's eye, rolling in its fine frenzy, glances from heaven to earth, as well as from earth to heaven. The humours of a very earthy and degenerate gentleman may evoke and inspire that imagination, that insight, no less strongly than the fresh virginal passion of the lovers of Verona. The phenomenon of this two-fold faculty at least need not surprise us. In a book published not so very long ago, and familiar to us all, I find within the same covers certain lines about King Arthur's death :—

> I am going a long way
> With these thou seëst—if indeed I go
> (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)—
> To the island-valley of Avilion ;
> Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
> Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
> Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
> And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
> Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.

This poem is immediately succeeded in the volume by another, no less familiar to us, of which this is a fragment :—

> Me an' thy muther, Sammy, 'as beän a-talkin' o' thee ;
> Thou's beän talkin' to muther, an' she beän a tellin' it me.
> Thou'll not marry for munny—thou's sweet upo' parson's lass—
> Noä—thou'll marry for luvv—an' we boäth on us thinks tha an ass.
>
> . . . . . .

Do'ant be stunt: taäke time: I knaws what maäkes tha sa mad.
Warn't I craäzed fur the lasses mysén when I wur a lad?
But I knaw'd a Quaäker feller as often 'as towd ma this:
"Doänt thou marry for munny, but goä wheer munny is!"

I confess that it does not surprise me that Lord Tennyson should at least have shown us on occasion how in this, and a few like poems, he possesses a gift of humour and of characterisation absolutely Shakspearian in quality. Nor am I surprised that he, like Shakspeare, being what they were, should not have worked always that same vein of genius. After the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, close following on the *Henry IV.* plays (an admirable comedy for those who abstain from seeing it on the stage), Shakspeare continued to diversify many a fine tragedy and comedy with episodes of humorous lower middle-class life; but he never again made it the staple of a plot. This also is not wonderful. "Spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues," he says himself, and he to whom we have just now likened him reminds us that

> We needs must love the *highest* when we see it,
> Not Lancelot nor another.

THE THREE STAGES OF SHAKSPEARE'S ART

II

SUMMER

(1598–1605)

CLOSE upon fifty years after Shakspeare's death, on a fine summer evening in 1665, John Dryden and his noble friends Lord Mulgrave, Sir Charles Sedley, and others, engaged in a memorable conversation (afterwards reported by Dryden himself) on the condition of the drama in England at that moment. It was only five years after the Restoration, and the drama, long exiled, had come back with the king, and had likewise brought back many changed rules, fashions, and (it must be added) vices. Among changed fashions was the practice of writing tragedies in the rhymed couplet, *à la Française.* This subject of the merits of rhyme as against blank verse is one of the many topics discussed

on that memorable evening. One of Dryden's friends attacks the innovation—for innovation it was; few, since Shakspeare, until the Restoration, having reverted to the "tagged verse," which had marked an earlier, ruder, stage of dramatic art. Dryden defends it; not very successfully, and not even with an air of very firm conviction. He had already written tragedy in rhyme, and was destined after some years to return to blank verse; and Dryden's opinions were always (as has been truly said) in a "state of flux." The rhymed tragedy of Dryden was, of course, an exotic. It was not developed out of any antecedent English stage of the drama; it was adopted from another nation. It was practised because the French writers practised it. It was a fashion, and therefore doomed to be ephemeral. Dryden could not see this. There is no evidence in this famous *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* that he even guessed why Shakspeare, after largely using it in the earliest of his poetic dramas, came in the second stage of his art (as we have called it) to abandon it altogether. We may, I believe, both guess and justly decide this question—not because we are profounder critics than Dryden, but because we are, for all practical purposes, equally far away from both Shakspeare and Dryden—from the fashion, or the bias, of the age which contributed to direct the form their genius was to take and to determine their opinion.

For the first seven years of Shakspeare's period of dramatic productiveness I took *Love's Labour's Lost*, the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet* as the chief examples of his poetic drama, and two historical plays as specimens of his comic prose. We pass now to the next seven years, 1598-1605, and of this period I take the *Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It* as the maturest specimens of his comedy. And the mere sound of their names, and the ideas and associations they conjure up before us, at once tell us (whether we pretend to be critics or no) that we have changed our climate and are breathing a different air. And it is this that I desire to make clear to those—and they are always the majority of the lovers of Shakspeare—who have no pretension to be Shakspeare critics or scholars, nor even students in the common acceptation of the term; whose education and tastes do not lie in that direction, and who are, like the poet in Wordsworth's verses, "contented to enjoy" the things "that others understand." I want all such still to recognise that, without being critics or commentators, they may still find much unsuspected pleasure and heightened interest in their reading, from tracing in these plays the sure marks of Shakspeare's growing experience, growing mind, and growing mastery over the resources of his art. For it is not by reading other critics, and other commentators, that we make ourselves good

critics and commentators. It is our own love for and interest in any author that first sets us watching him and his changes for ourselves. It is love and interest that opens our own eyes to see. And I know that the things we discover about an author, as we come to acquire increased interest in him, must in turn react upon that interest, and make it deeper and more profitable. We shall not love Shakspeare less, but more, by discovering that, marvellous genius as he was, he was yet a man like ourselves, and was taught, and profited by, the discovery in himself and in his art of things that wanted mending, of things that did not satisfy him.

Now the comedy that beyond all question marks the transition from Shakspeare's first stage to his second is perhaps the most popular of Shakspeare's comedies—the *Merchant of Venice*. It stands, by general agreement of critics, on the borderland between the first period of seven years and the second. That is to say, it belongs to about 1597 or 1598. And the internal evidence of style would alone bring us to the same conclusion. Rhyme is still in favour, and largely used. Not whole scenes, but long passages from whole scenes, are still in rhyme; and even fragments in the stanza-form are here and there found. The diction is less florid, as a rule, than in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream*; but it is florid, and even wordy, in places; and the euphuistic fashion

of over-doing illustration from the Greek and Roman mythologies is very noticeable. You all know this play so well that I scarcely need to do more than indicate the passages I refer to. You will remember how, in the most notable scenes, rhyme alternates with blank verse, for some reason not easy to account for. For instance, Bassanio on opening the right casket—the one containing Portia's portrait—begins his exclamation of delight and relief in animated blank verse, thus :—

> What find I here?
> Fair Portia's counterfeit! What demi-god
> Hath come so near creation? Move these eyes?
> Or whether, riding on the balls of mine,
> Seem they in motion? Here are sever'd lips,
> Parted with sugar-breath: so sweet a bar
> Should sunder such sweet friends.

Yet immediately afterwards, when he has read the scroll, he relapses into the rhymed couplet :—

> A gentle scroll. Fair lady, by your leave;
> I come by note, to give and to receive.
> Like one of two contending in a prize,
> That thinks he hath done well in people's eyes,
> Hearing applause and universal shout,
> Giddy in spirit, still gazing in a doubt
> Whether those peals of praise be his or no;
> So, thrice-fair lady, stand I, even so;
> As doubtful whether what I see be true,
> Until confirm'd, sign'd, ratified by you.

Now both these portions of Bassanio's speech —the unrhymed and the rhymed—we shall agree

are as beautiful as they can be, in their respective ways. He would be an ungrateful reader who wished them other than they are ; and yet we detect, so far, no certain reason why Shakspeare used rhyme during one dozen lines and no rhyme for the next dozen. Well, we pass immediately to Portia's reply, a speech perhaps the most exquisite, the most womanly in feeling, as well as the most subtly varied in diction and rhythm, in the whole range of the Shakspearian drama, which is saying a good deal :—

> You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
> Such as I am : though for myself alone
> I would not be ambitious in my wish,
> To wish myself much better ; yet, for you
> I would be trebled twenty times myself ;
> A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
> More rich ;
> That only to stand high in your account,
> I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
> Exceed account ; but the full sum of me
> Is sum of something, which, to term in gross,
> Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised ;
> Happy in this, she is not yet so old
> But she may learn ; happier than this,
> She is not bred so dull but she can learn ;
> Happiest of all is that her gentle spirit
> Commits itself to yours to be directed,
> As from her lord, her governor, her king.
> Myself and what is mine to you and yours
> Is now converted : but now I was the lord
> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself ; and even now, but now,
> This house, these servants and this same myself

> Are yours, my lord: I give them with this ring;
> Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
> Let it presage the ruin of your love
> And be my vantage to exclaim on you.

I think there will be little difference among us as to the matchless beauty of these lines. At this stage of Shakspeare's mastery over the resources of blank verse we must at last feel that the battle of blank verse against rhyme is *lost* and *won*. In those earlier plays—rich also in a beauty of their own—*Love's Labour's Lost* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, we might not have come to this conclusion, because the capabilities of blank verse as against rhyme were not yet so apparent as to be irresistible. The varieties of blank verse—its flexibility, its perpetual changes and surprises of effect—that are so clear to us in the passage I have just read, were not as yet discernible, because Shakspeare had not yet impressed upon blank verse his own individuality; he was still to an extent in the leading-strings of Marlowe and Greene. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, indeed, there is a *liveliness* about the rhymed passages that is wanting in the blank verse, eloquent and refined as it is. But here, I ask you to observe, all this is changed. The liveliness has departed out of the rhyme and is found in the blank verse, so flexible is it, so evidently adapted to lend itself to every varying mood of the speaker, every inflection of his mind and heart. And when once Shakspeare had attained this mastery over his instru-

ment, the supremacy of the rhymed couplet in his dramatic verse was at an end. Yes, and I may add that almost from this very scene (the second of the third act) of the *Merchant of Venice* the reign of rhyme was at an end. Never again in this play, save in one subsequent speech of Portia, when she is for the moment merry and elated, does the rhymed couplet recur. Never in any serious or tragic passage, never at all in Shylock's mouth; never in the "quality of mercy" speech, or in the Trial Scene at all. In fact, the earnestness and intensity of the play may be said to have killed rhyme. We feel that Shakspeare, as he grew in earnestness, which means in *human*-ness, must have abandoned it for good and all. And it is profoundly interesting that it should be this play which witnessed its overthrow. For the play was a comedy, and was meant originally to be humorous throughout, save where it was sentimental, as in its love-passages. Shylock was not meant to be the leading character of the piece. In such a case Shakspeare would doubtless have called it, after him, the *Usurer of Venice*, or even simply *Shylock*, as he did when a Macbeth or an Othello was the central figure of the drama. Shakspeare called the play after Antonio—the *Merchant of Venice*—not, indeed, because Antonio is the leading figure of the play, but because he is the connecting link between the two stories of which the drama is made up—the story of the pound of flesh and the story of the caskets—

the "Shylock incident" and the "Bassanio incident."

Very interesting to us, from many points of view, is this play—the most popular perhaps of all Shakspeare's comedies. For it *is* a comedy, in the technical sense, seeing that it ends happily. And yet it is the tragical interest pervading it that has so impressed it upon the memories of us moderns. And, stranger still, where to us it is tragic, its author, at the outset of his task, meant it to be comic. Before Shakspeare began to write, the Jew of the drama had been always a monster of wickedness, and (as in the miracle plays) with a comic exterior—made up with a pantomime wig and nose—to excite ridicule. So it was in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*; so, doubtless, in that earlier play (now lost) called the *Jew*, where the pound of flesh and the caskets had been already combined into a plot, and which Shakspeare, with his admirable freedom in borrowing, had "conveyed" bodily to his own use. I think, from expressions and allusions in the comedy itself, there can be no doubt that Shylock was at first meant to be no other than the stock Jew of the stage. And so strong, remember, continued that original estimate of the character that, up to a hundred years ago nearly, it kept the stage, and Shylock was treated as a low-comedy creation. It was Macklin, the actor and dramatist, who first (some hundred and fifty years ago) treated him as a serious

personage, and as even making demands upon the spectators' sympathy, and in doing so called forth the often-quoted criticism, "This is the Jew that Shakspeare drew." A just criticism, but there are signs scarcely to be mistaken that it was not the Jew that Shakspeare at starting *intended* to draw; but the humanity of the poet, as the character grew under his hand, interposed, and refused to allow all the spectators' sympathy to go with the gentlemen who, priding themselves on their Christianity, yet thought it nothing derogatory to spit and call names on the Rialto. It is this divided instinct in the poet, his duty to the conventional and popular conception of the Jew, and his allegiance to his own conscience and sense of right, that makes the slight discrepancies, and perhaps with them the fascination of this drama. The language used *about* Shylock in the play marks him out as a fiend, an incarnation of all that is inhuman; but his own language does much to neutralise this, and to make such charges recoil upon his adversaries. And here is yet another instance of how the humanity of the poet was overruling another of the conventions, not merely artistic, of his time, and how the truer humorous sense of the poet destroyed the lower and poorer. And it is this which I think we shall more and more notice in reading the plays of Shakspeare's second period—how this humanity of his, his power of sympathy with his characters, increasingly keeps under, or drives out, the mere

fashions and artificialities of his age. What imaginative literature, and especially poetic and dramatic literature, wanted at the period when Shakspeare began to write was just this—it wanted a profound and a sincere man, who was also supreme in the imaginative faculty, to raise literature above the atmosphere of pedantry and of fancy, running into eccentricity, which so long possessed the Tudor and Stuart times, and of which euphuism is the most familiar example. Literature wanted a perfectly *sane* genius to guide it through the snares and pitfalls that encompassed it (and if there are any present so unfortunate as not to know Charles Lamb's profound essay, entitled the *Sanity of True Genius*, let them refer thither for further explanation). A fashion can never be killed save by bringing it into conflict with something healthier. That great phrase of Dr. Chalmers is as true in the region of art as in that of ethics—that phrase, "the expulsive power of a strong affection"—a poor affection can only be driven out by a worthier. Shakspeare, indeed, at no period of his life, even when his art was least mature, was ever frivolous. His earlier plays, often overlaid with ornament and interpenetrated with the euphuistic trick of speech, yet have beneath them always the sweet, the divinely *human* touch.

On first thoughts the comedy that I named as representative of this middle period, *As You Like It*, might indeed seem to be a relapse into the

fantastic and artificial after the direct and almost tragic force of much in the *Merchant of Venice*. This delightful play is almost as much a fairy-tale as the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, if improbability of incident, and a Forest of Arden, with lionesses and serpents, and other such fantastic adjuncts, make up fairyland. It is indeed the land of pastoral poetry, which is to all intents and purposes "no man's land." The play is (like the *Winter's Tale*) a dramatised novel. The novel, called *Rosalynde*, by Thomas Lodge, dramatist and general literary craftsman in prose and verse, had been published nearly ten years, and become very popular, when Shakspeare adopted it. Lodge's romance, in prose interspersed with songs and sonnets, was imitated, like Sidney's *Arcadia*, from the Italian and Spanish pastoral writers, one of the innumerable variations upon a theme—the supposed happy life of shepherds and shepherdesses —which, first made popular at the Renaissance in the idylls of Theocritus and Virgil, had fascinated in extraordinary degree the imagination of Europe, and had rapidly spread through all countries, infecting all literatures, like an intellectual influenza. The fashion did not pass away so soon as many epidemics, for it survived in various shapes until late in the last century, and may be tracked still in those little Watteau-like groups in Dresden china that still adorn many a best parlour in a country house. Here, again, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, we find Shakspeare the

satirist of a "fad." Lodge's *Rosalynde* was written to meet the unfailing demand for pastoral romance. Shakspeare adopted it for the purposes of his own genius, recognising doubtless the real poetic and dramatic capabilities of the story, but seeing also with his all-embracing sense of humour an opportunity for satirising what was *unreal* in the pastoral mania. In Lodge's romance there is no satire—no Touchstone to act as the exquisite running commentary, or chorus, upon the preposterous dream that able-bodied young men and women of education could wisely leave the duties of social life to make love under hawthorn hedges, and watch their flocks, under skies that were always sunny. "And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone?" "Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now, in respect that it is in the fields, it pleaseth me very well; but in respect that it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach."

I am dealing with such changes in Shakspeare's art, that is to say in the way he dealt with his materials, during the period covered by the composition of his plays. And in so doing, it would seem obvious to consider the *plots* of his dramas; for more and more in our own days does

the plot affect our judgment of a play or a story. Clever construction, ingenious imbroglio, novel and startling incident, are the qualities that nowadays make the fortune of an author (or his publisher), not characterisation, humour, poetry, and the sweet human atmosphere that envelops the whole. And the consequence is that originality in the matter of plot is watched for with a rigorous jealousy. If the startling incident—some novel and ghastly use of Nature's secrets—turns out to have been used before, or not to have been invented by the artist using it, there at once "begins the scandal and the cry." Only the other day the lady author of an admirable story of child-life was severely handled because another book, never heard of, contained two or three of the same incidents; and actually it was considered worth fighting out the battle in the newspapers—a curious, but instructive, comment upon the change that has come over our standards of artistic value. In the really palmy days of literature such charges of plagiarism were unheard of; and we (such hypocrites or so inconsistent we are) pretend that they did not signify then, though they signify apparently so much now. In this matter of plagiarism, so called, let it be understood once for all that it is not where a man finds his material that determines his originality, but what he does with his material when he has got it. Shakspeare (as far as we know) originated but one plot in his life. Sometimes he

took a previously written and acted play; sometimes an existing romance from the French or Italian in prose or verse; sometimes an episode of chronicle-history from Holinshed, or a biography from Plutarch; sometimes a hackneyed anecdote from some popular chap-book. And it is abundantly evident that the plagiarist, so far from showing any desire to conceal his theft, actually chose those themes *because* they were already so widely known. The modern plagiarist steals when he thinks the theft will escape notice. It was the other way about with Shakspeare. He stole because the material had already proved itself attractive, and was therefore likely to attract further notice in its new dress. And how new that dress was! His raw material was in most cases, as we have the means of verifying, "raw" indeed. When poor Mr. Baps, the dancing-master in *Dombey and Son*, who dabbled in political economy and was always boring his friends with it, asked Mr. Toots at Dr. Blimber's party: "What are you to do with your raw material when it comes into your ports in exchange for your drain of gold?" Mr. Toots suggested, "Cook 'em," an answer that failed to satisfy Mr. Baps. But it is precisely what Shakspeare did with his raw material, and we all know with what magnificent gastronomic results!

Therefore, in one sense, we cannot trace the growth of Shakspeare's art or humour by the

stories he invented, for in their general outline he did not invent them. Nor can we put it that he chose better and better plots as he advanced in experience and judgment. In tragedy he always chose, even from the first, stories with splendid opportunities. The very names of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Lear*, assure us of that, and *Romeo and Juliet*, a much earlier play, is no exception. But in comedy, it must be allowed, he was not always so fortunate. The stories of *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Cymbeline*, if we first heard them related in unvarnished prose, might not seem to any of us either pleasant or hopeful material for a comedy. And we have only to imagine how such stories would have fared if treated by a second-class imagination, to be struck once more with the extraordinary first-class quality of Shakspeare's. The incidents are often so exasperatingly disagreeable, in themselves, that we wonder how a dramatist, who had a large range of Italian fiction current in England to choose from, should have been attracted to them. We feel this now and then, I fancy, even in his most favourite comedies. To many, I think, the pleasure derived from *Much Ado about Nothing*—as to the greater part of which, the Beatrice and Benedick part, and the Dogberry and Verges part, we should all agree that Shakspeare is at his very best—the pleasure of these, I say, is hindered by the secondary plot, dealing with the false charge against Hero, where the silliness and

cruelty of those who assume her guilt are hard to believe even in fiction. And yet, and yet, such is the fusing power, the controlling strength, of the dramatist that even this extreme case becomes all but probable and reasonable when we see it enacted. This is partly due to the author's training to the stage, which taught him what is dramatically effective. But far more is it due to that sure-footed step of his in things moral, that he never slips even on the most dangerous ground; that he leaves us in the end satisfied; that he never allows us at least to be for one moment uncertain as to where his own sympathies are engaged.

That there is a certain *sameness* in Shakspeare's comedies—I refer to the repetition of a certain class of incidents—follows from the circumstance that he took his stories from a class of literature where certain stock incidents were in frequent use: such as the mistakes arising out of the personal likeness between two characters; that of the young ladies dressing in men's attire, for some purpose of the story, and then being fallen in love with by one of their own sex. When Charles and Mary Lamb were writing their *Tales from Shakspeare*, poor Mary, who had undertaken the comedies, grew weary of having to describe such masquerading so often. "She thinks Shakspeare must have wanted imagination," Lamb writes to a friend. The truth is, that Shakspeare could not escape the inconvenience attendant on following a taste

of the hour. If he handicapped himself, so long as he was in bondage to the euphuistic fashion, so did he, in another way, when he chose a popular class of incidents for his comedies. But, on the whole, we must agree that if he incurred *this* danger he avoided certain others, by not inventing his own subjects. If there is necessarily a mannerism in any fashion of the hour, there is also, remember, an inevitable mannerism in a man's own tastes and fads; and when an author invents his plots we must allow that the taste and bias of the inventor is conspicuous in a certain mannerism of the whole, however unlike may be the separate incidents of the story. Recall the writers who have achieved most celebrity in the last few years as masters of "constructive skill," and ask yourselves whether the very ingenuity and novelty that is so admired, elaborated out of the author's own brain, does not tend to become painfully monotonous—problem plays, plays written to fit particular actors. On the other hand, although the incidents of Shakspeare's comedies are often alike, how unlike, do we not notice, at the same time, are the plays themselves, as a whole! Shakspeare may repeat his devices (because he found them in the stories that came first to hand), but the play in each case comes out perfectly distinct from its companions. And I take the reason of this, first and foremost, to be that the writer did not invent a subject to suit his own capabilities

and his own *limitations*. Any subject involving the free play of human affections, passions, joys, sorrows, frailties, ambitions, and temptations, seems to have been good enough for Shakspeare. He cared for *man* more than for *incidents*. We recognise Shakspeare in his plays neither by the incidents nor by the class of character chosen to represent. We recognise him by the way in which he makes his incidents subordinate to the varied, yet unvarying, humanity of the characters. How distinct, I repeat, are his comedies—*As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Winter's Tale*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Tempest*. It is only the consummate imagination, the poetry, the moral wisdom and sweetness, together with the magic of style, that declare their writer to be one and the same. There is a mannerism in these qualities that forbids us to conceive that they could have had different authors. But for the rest, each has its own atmosphere, and they move apart and distinct in the firmament of creative energy.

Therefore, we are not to trace so much how Shakspeare's raw material improves (for it seems almost a chance to the end of his life whether the story that he had to transmute into a play was *prima facie* a good one or not), but it is open to us to observe what class of subjects seem more and more to have attracted him as he advanced in experience of life, as the "graver mind" more and more asserted itself above the "lighter heart,"

and (what is more immediately to our purpose) how this mental and moral growth affected the masterliness of his workmanship and the clearness and effectiveness of his dialogue. The two comedies that follow in chronological order those just dealt with seem to have been *Much Ado about Nothing* (1599) and *Twelfth Night* (1601). Now to *us* the first named of these infallibly suggests what in Shakspeare's intention was the underplot. "Much ado about nothing," a proverb of the day, of course points to the misery caused by the preposterous charge against poor Hero. This is, in fact, the centre of the entire fable, and therefore gives its name to the play. Yet the *Benedick and Beatrice* part has always taken precedence of the other, partly because those on whom poor Hero's fate brought all this trouble so entirely fail to gain our sympathy. But this incomparable pair, though in the first instance merely the comic relief to the serious interest, actually themselves constitute (if we come to think) the serious interest of the drama; just because they are real people, real flesh and blood, while some of those more deeply concerned in Hero's fortunes are but shadows. The lady and gentleman are indeed delightful in their holiday moods, with their wit and their never-failing resource, but beneath it all are the true man and the true woman. Much of Beatrice's repartee has lost its point for us, and some of it we have become too refined to enjoy; but when she

begins to feel true compassion, just resentment, all this falls away—a mere society manner that can be put on and put off at will. It is a mistake to treat Beatrice as originally a coquette, with a talent for saying smart things, and then suddenly "converted to womanliness" by her cousin's wrongs. Beatrice is a lady from the beginning, as any one who remembers the late Miss Helen Faucit in the character can never have forgotten; and I think nowhere does what I have called the "clarifying" effect upon language of genuine feeling and earnestness exhibit itself more decisively than in the outburst of Beatrice after the pitiable and shameful scene in the church, where Hero's good name has been blasted on evidence that in our own day would not have hanged a kitten! The euphuism of coquetry, the badinage of the salon, has disappeared in this scene, and the euphuism of style has passed away with it. A bit of true, loving, right-minded womanhood has scattered it to the winds. It is Beatrice who terrifies all the men with her sarcasm and cutting remarks, who is still the real salt of this play, the ozone of its atmosphere. And Shakspeare, in the lightest and most fantastic of his comedies, is never without the felt presence of this moral element. It is this which from first to last—though the incidents may be terrible, or ghastly, or improbable—keeps the whole range of his drama sweet; the one strongest, most enduring charm; the thing on which his enduring

popularity with all sorts and conditions of men most surely rests.

I was to speak in these lectures of a growth in Shakspeare's *art*, and you see how naturally one relapses into discussing his characters; perhaps because the most attractive as well as the "proper study of mankind" is man. But besides this, it is a part of our inquiry to trace how the growing interest in the deeper problems and mysteries of life brings about a corresponding depth and reality in Shakspeare's literary form, and gives strength to his poetic hand. Two great tragedies belong to this second period of Shakspeare's productivity. In one of these every character is more familiar and more "alive" to us than the real historical personages of Elizabeth or James. Every speech, every happy phrase, every fragment of moral wisdom in *Hamlet* are with us "household words." The very abundance of the "old quotations" in *Hamlet* shows us that we have reached a new stage of Shakspeare's dominion over us. I suppose *Romeo and Juliet* is as rich in beauty, poetry, eloquence, power, and charm as *Hamlet*, yet there must be ten times as many often-quoted passages from *Hamlet* as from it. If you care to refresh your memory by turning to any *Handbook of Familiar Quotations* (a tolerably safe guide to the popular taste), you will see, under the heading *Hamlet*, that not only the quantity but the quality of the passages

that men have adopted into their daily speech has somehow changed. For the most part, the utterances borrowed from *Romeo and Juliet* savour of their origin. Quotations, like the shell from the sea-shore held to the child's ear, whisper of the ocean from which they came; and these suggest the flavour of the languishing Italian clime. "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet"; or "Parting is such sweet sorrow that I could say 'good-night' until to-morrow." The whole subject of popular quotations is one of great interest, and not to be dealt with in a parenthesis. A large proportion of these from a writer like Shakspeare, who possesses that supreme thing called *style*, owe their popularity to some exquisite felicity or picturesqueness of expression; and thus they attain a vogue among educated people something akin to what proverbs have among those less educated. Shakspeare puts some common observation of mankind into a form that cannot be improved upon, and some one else having discovered it and first applied it, other people follow, and so the success of the quotation is assured for all time. "Out-heroding Herod" is an obvious example, and is, moreover, a curious instance how, through losing all touch with its context, a quotation may be continually used with a lack of appropriateness quite amusing. But setting aside these neutral passages—popular for their mere usefulness—a hasty glance

over these picked passages from the different plays of Shakspeare is not without its use. They convey, in the aggregate, the particular colouring of each play—the "key" in which it is composed. And as we pass from even *Romeo and Juliet*, and the more serious and tragic parts of the *Merchant of Venice*, we find ourselves, in *Hamlet* and in *Othello*, entering worlds of a new intensity, and with them a more matured, a stronger, greater style.

Hamlet, the finished play as it left Shakspeare's hands, belongs to 1603 or thereabouts. The story of the Prince of Denmark whose father was murdered by his uncle was already in many shapes famous, and its dramatic capabilities had been early discovered. There was a prose romance taken from the French, still extant; and there had been at least one English play on the subject before Shakspeare took it in hand—a tragedy with a ghost in it, urging the tardy son to vengeance; and a German version of this play was being acted in Germany about the same time that Shakspeare produced his. There is no doubt that here again Shakspeare chose his subject because of its popularity already approved. But as he took other property of his wherever he found it, he was now to take it from a writer of the day, who apart from his works is absolutely a name to us and nothing more, and that writer was Thomas Kyd. As far as I am aware, not a single fact or date is known about this

person, save that he wrote for the stage in the reign of Elizabeth, and that he was the author of an extremely popular play called *Jeronimo*, or the *Spanish Tragedy*. Yes, one thing more is known, and it is in the highest degree significant. In the splendid lines addressed by Ben Jonson to the memory of his "Well-beloved Master" William Shakspeare, he deprecates comparison of him with his contemporaries, though he says that otherwise he might well point out—

> How far thou didst our Lyly outshine,
> Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.

This well-known couplet has often fallen upon the reader's ear with an uncertain sound. We know, and can verify, the assertion as regards two of these named, and the appropriateness of their choice—for on comparison Shakspeare falls into natural rank, as regards Marlowe and Lyly. Marlowe did the stage the unsurpassable service of first using blank verse in the public theatre; and when in his hands it became a "mighty line" indeed. Lyly did a service hardly inferior, by first writing comedy in prose; a factitious and unnatural prose, no doubt, but still opening a way for Shakspeare to "better the instruction." But who, the reader asks, was Kyd? and if he was merely a popular dramatist what relevancy was there in the comparison between him and Shakspeare? For when we compare a man of supreme genius with another, even to point out that he

"outshines him," there must be some decorum in the contrast. There must have been something about this man Kyd, considered as one who helped on the dramatic art in England, which led Jonson to introduce him into this passage. Remember that Ben Jonson, besides being the great dramatist that he was, was also the leading scholar and critic of his day, and as such did not compare or contrast idly.

Ben Jonson applied to Thomas Kyd the epithet "sporting," but this was merely a play upon his name, a concession to that taste for a pun, in season or out of season, another of the common and stubborn symptoms of the euphuism epidemic. It was a grim jest too, for Kyd's topics and treatment were far other than sportive. His *Spanish Tragedy* was certainly written before 1589, and therefore before Shakspeare had produced a tragedy at all. Now this play (actually the sequel to a former play less known) achieved an extraordinary popularity in its day, and its day was a long one. Twelve years after its first production we find Jonson paid by managers for "additions to" it—for "writing up," as we should call it, various scenes. For the popularity of the play, as it came first from the hand of its author, was certainly not due to any poetry or "elevation" of language. Partly in so-called blank verse, but largely in rhyme, it rarely rises above commonplace, and is often veritable doggerel. Its popularity was won by the plot and the situations,

which were really of a most startling and effective kind. Time fails me to tell you the story—you will find the play in *Dodsley*, an easily accessible book.[1] For the moment it is sufficient to point out that the plot is a kind of *Hamlet* reversed. In *Hamlet* a son discovers a father's murder; in the *Spanish Tragedy* the father, *old Jeronimo*, discovers the murder of his son. He goes distracted in consequence, and in the end makes use of the machinery of a "play within a play" (as also in *Hamlet*) to bring home the crime to its true author; the play ending, again like *Hamlet*, with the visiting of the sins of the guilty upon the innocent, and a carnage among the principal characters as wholesale as that which so shocked Voltaire and the eighteenth-century critics of Shakspeare.

And monstrous, even to grotesqueness, as is much of this drama, poor and crude as is its language, it marked in some respects an advance in the development of English tragedy, greater even than Marlowe had attained. As poets and masters of the harmony of the English tongue, comparison between the two dramatists is idle. Marlowe was one of the greatest; Kyd one of the least. Yet it is not too much to say that there is

[1] [Since this lecture was given the plays of Kyd have been edited by Prof. Boas, with elaborate prolegomena, including a memoir which contains a good many more facts than the three referred to above. Mr. Boas makes it quite certain that Kyd was the author of the Hamlet play upon which Shakspeare worked; but he is inclined to allow his *protégé* too much of the credit for the final result.]

more grasp of what constitutes an effective tragic story in *Jeronimo* than in anything Marlowe has left us; more, in short, of what goes to make the superb effect, *as a whole*, in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or *Lear*. And it is to this fact, I believe, that Jonson was pointing in that memorable passage. To say that Shakspeare "outshone" Kyd as a poet would be about as absurd as to say that Mr. Browning outshone the poet Close. But to say that Shakspeare "outshone" Kyd in having followed a path that Kyd opened, and yet by virtue of imagination, poetry, profound thought, and the matured power of art, left Kyd immeasurable leagues behind, is neither impertinent nor meaningless, but such a criticism as was quite natural to one like Jonson, to whom the incidents and situations of both *Jeronimo* and of *Hamlet* were as perfectly familiar as those of the latter are to ourselves.

Coming then to this group of tragedies that mark the close of our second period of Shakspeare's art—*Hamlet* and *Othello*—we feel that what marks them above all that has gone before is *maturity*—that we have reached the manhood of Shakspeare's genius. Indeed, instead of that sentimental nomenclature of mine, for which I have already apologised, I might have characterised the first two periods not as spring and summer, but as youth and manhood; only, what should I have called the third, seeing that neither in his life nor in his art was Shakspeare to feel old age? And so if summer stands for ripeness, before even the

shadows of decay have begun to fall, the word may stand. Ripeness is strength, and *strength* is what strikes us now, in this stage of the poet's art. Mastery—mastery over his material, mastery over his gifts, and, may we not add, mastery over himself. The language in the main is changed; it loses its redundance as it has to grapple more and more closely with the problems of the life and soul of man. Shakspeare's language does not (like Marlowe's) grow in efflorescence and in magniloquence as his incidents rise in wonder or terribleness. Rather, as the incidents thus rise, his language calms into simplicity and reverence. Before the majesty of Life—its sorrows, fears, passions, yearnings—the language becomes grave and clear—and stronger *because* graver and clearer —till often all that differences Elizabethan English from our own seems to fall away, and the verse becomes as modern as Wordsworth or Tennyson would write.

During many, many later periods of criticism in English history, Shakspeare has passed for a "sensational" writer, and his sensationalism has given great offence to many, both at home and abroad. In a sense, it is a true charge. There are plays of Shakspeare as sensational in their incidents as *Tamburlaine* or *Jeronimo*. The situations in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*—what could be more so? And if they had been treated by a writer wanting the quality that Shakspeare gave them, they might have been equally popular, but *for how*

long? As far as we can judge, the *Spanish Tragedy* in its own day was quite as successful, quite as popular as *Hamlet.* But where is *Jeronimo* now? And this is why a sober critic must refuse to brand *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* with the name of "sensational." The truth of the matter was pointed out long ago by Charles Lamb, in words that cannot be bettered, in commenting on a play of Webster's; and in these words he has defined for all time the essential weakness and rottenness of the thing called "sensationalism." "To move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wear and weary life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments," *this*, Lamb says, Webster has done in his *Duchess of Malfy*; and he adds, "inferior geniuses may upon horror's head horrors accumulate, but they cannot do this. They mistake quantity for quality; they terrify babes with painted devils—but they know not how a soul is to be moved. Their terrors want dignity, their affrightments are without decorum." Now, we could not, if we sought far and near, find a better description of what sensationalism is, and of what Shakspeare is not, and, moreover, of the popular literary food of our own day. The mistaking "quantity for quality," the "piling up the agony" as it is called, the skilfulness in adding horror to horror, surprise to surprise, and with it the absolute impotence to "move the human soul,"—terrors without dignity, and affright-

ments without decorum—how better could we describe the works of fiction that satisfy all the imaginative requirements of whole classes? No, it is not the surprising, the supernatural, the sanguinary nature of his incidents that constitutes a writer *sensational.* It is the use he *fails* to make of these incidents. It is his having recourse to the marvellous when he has no imagination, and to the terrible when he has no real human sympathy; *this* that writes him down "sensationalist," and *this*, let me add, which causes that his writings, often the enthusiasm of one generation, are destined to become the laughing-stock of the next!

In that *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* of Dryden's, referred to at the outset of my lecture, the writer has occasion to deliver a well-known criticism on Shakspeare: "He was the Man who, of all modern and perhaps ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive Soul. All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily. When he describes anything, you more than see it—you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike: were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid: his

Comick Wit degenerating into clenches [*i.e.* puns], his Serious Swelling into Bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him: no man can say he ever had a fit Subject for his Wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of the Poets,

> "Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi"
> [As towers the cypress o'er the pliant shrub].

These words may sound to us at first rather patronising; in a degree they are, for Dryden's own ways, dramatic and other, were not Shakspeare's. But Dryden could hardly help getting to the root of the matter somehow. For, like the Ben Jonson of forty years earlier, he was the first critic of his day. And when he says that Shakspeare is always great when some great occasion is presented to him, and that he rose just in proportion as he had a "fit subject for his wit," he is indeed and in truth "touching the thing with the needle's point." He proclaims the real secret of Shakspeare's growth in genius, as in art; he proclaims not less his growth as a wise and good man; and in this criticism is comprised also the explanation of Shakspeare's weakness, as of his strength. It only needs guarding (in my judgment) by this addition, that the fit subjects came to him, not wholly by chance, but that they more and more attracted him as he himself grew in moral seriousness. If a genius had it in him to rise to a great theme, how could

he help rising to such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or that strange but most profound drama—technically a comedy, but in its colouring throughout tragic—*Measure for Measure*. Suffering, and the transfiguration of all noble suffering into victory; goodness defeated but never humiliated; the littleness of man always made to bring into light, not shadow, the real greatness of man—it is in the "strength of that meat" that we rise up fortified from the study of these mighty works.

THE THREE STAGES OF SHAKSPEARE'S ART

III

AUTUMN

(1605–1612)

THE veil that seems to hang over the personality of Shakspeare,—a veil that we have so often mourned and sought in vain to pierce,—is not wholly due to the scantiness of our information from without, to the absence of any contemporary accounts of him and his fortunes (although mention of him is singularly abundant), and to the lack of any "Boswell" in any shape whatever. It is due also obviously to the fact that (putting on one side a few narrative and lyric poems) he was a dramatist, and as such wrote, never in his own person but always as some one else. We are apt to forget that in the instance of so many dear and loved authors of our country we know them from themselves, quite as much as

we know them from their Boswells. We know Pope and Swift from their writings. They admit us to their tastes, their fancies, their prejudices, their philosophy, their weaknesses. We know them *there*, and the stories of Martha Blount or Stella hardly add to our vital knowledge of them. For it is not "chatter" about these that establishes our completer view of the man. Even the novelist, who like his brother dramatist is always presenting his characters and not himself to our criticism, now and again relapses into himself, and by his own criticism upon the creations of his fancy permits us to form a really valuable judgment of himself, his ideals and standards, his likes and dislikes. But the dramatist can never step apart from the characters he draws to survey them and tell us what he thinks. If a character passes under such review, it can only be at the hands of yet another character (not the author) in the same drama.

And so it comes about that, of all our supreme writers, Shakspeare is in a way the most a stranger to us. Even if we feel convinced in our own minds from such-and-such a character or situation that Shakspeare *must* have thought so-and-so; that his religion, his philosophy of life, his political bias, *must* have lain in this or that direction, the answer is ever at hand: "Oh, not at all, it is his character who speaks, not the man Shakspeare; his treatment of men and things is in accordance with the exigencies of

the particular fable that he treats. He throws himself, marvel of protean change that he was, into any form, into any mood."

I hope I have thus far shown, to those who have honoured me by their presence here, that I am not in these lectures broaching any new theory, or supporting any old one, as to how we can evolve Shakspeare out of his works. I have absolutely no sympathy with those who would point to this passage, or to that play, and cry, "*Here*, or *here*, is the veritable Shakspeare." My method, so far as it can be called one, is (I hope) a different and a safer one—to try to add to our knowledge of the poet by noticing changes in those respects that are independent of the "characterisation" in the plays—the writer's own changes in style, in subject, and lastly in *tone*, which is more particularly our present topic. And this can only be done by considering the aspect of groups of plays taken together. We have dwelt upon Shakspeare's relations to various fashions of his day—how he began by being under their dominion, and then gradually subjected them to himself, as he advanced in firmness of step and clearness of purpose. And if we are justified in any inferences we have drawn, we are not, I think, without just a new gleam of light upon the nature and character of the writer, though we have not referred to any one saying of his, or moral apophthegm, as certainly conveying his own

sentiments in the matter. We have watched Shakspeare laughing at fashions of his day, and we know him all the better for it. I might have supplemented this view of him by the instance of that wonderful character, Ancient Pistol, a drunken, vapouring braggart, one of the many of that type in the Elizabethan drama, due to their precedents in Plautus and Terence—the *Boasting Soldier* (Pyrgopolinices's and such)—that delighted the world so at the Revival of Learning. One delightful feature, you remember, of "mine Ancient" is his showing a theatrical turn, and having picked up, while standing among the "groundlings" in the inn-yards, fragments of the popular tragedies of the day, producing them in season and out of season (but chiefly the latter), when more than usually the worse for liquor. It is not one of the least exquisite of Shakspeare's anachronisms that in plays, the scene of which is laid in Henry IV.'s reign, he allowed Falstaff's dependant to declaim passages from the most sensational plays of Marlowe and Peele, written only a few years before, and still the rage with a certain class of audience. You remember them—"Feed, and be fat, my fair Calipolis." "Have we not Hiren here?" "Hollow pampered jades of Asia, that cannot go but thirty miles a-day"—and so forth, being the choicest bits of bombast out of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and Peele's *Alcazar*. Here, I submit, we *are* allowed a veritable glimpse of what the

man Shakspeare was. Behind the mask of Pistol, we *do* know that there is a genuine humourist laughing at the false-tragic, the false-sublime of his day; and knowing how soon he, Shakspeare, was going to put that sort of thing out of date. If some one points to Portia's beautiful speech about Mercy, and argues from it what a peculiarly compassionate heart Shakspeare must have had, I am unconvinced, because the speech is dramatically appropriate to Portia, and not of necessity to the author. But when I take leave, as I have just done, to argue from Shakspeare's treatment of Pistol in this matter of his quotations from Shakspeare's contemporaries, the case is different. It *is* Shakspeare, and it is *not* Pistol, who is showing keen enjoyment in the absurdities of the popular drama of his day—in the "high-falutin" (if I may venture on yet another anachronism) of Peele and Marlowe. And we have to that extent advanced in our knowledge of Shakspeare in noticing these things. We have strengthened our growing conviction of what I have called the essential *sanity* of Shakspeare—his perception from the beginning of what was real and genuine in art as well as in human life.

Well, we have arrived now at the opening of that third period of his art, between 1605 and 1612, at which latter date, approximately, Shakspeare ceased to write, and retired, like the Thane of Cawdor, "a prosperous gentleman," to live

among his family and friends in his native Stratford. The mention of Peele and Marlowe reminds us opportunely how, not only as regards the *sanity* of his mind and art, Shakspeare showed himself worthy to uphold the dignity of literature as against their example. Those and other young men, of academical training, who looked with such envy and dislike on the young "literate" from Warwickshire, with his little Latin and less Greek, had lived from hand-to-mouth, in constant dissipation and wretchedness, and had died prematurely—some violent deaths, some of hunger or of their pleasant vices. Shakspeare, on the other hand, had worked his way, by honest labour and enterprise as actor and shareholder in his theatre, as well as by the writing of plays, from poverty to comfort, from comfort to comparative affluence. Whether or not he was the shrewd man of business, the keen striker of bargains, such as in an excess of revolt against idealism it is now the fashion to describe him, we cannot say. The main success of the Globe Theatre as a speculation may have been due to his "Fellows" and not to him. But this we know for certainty—that he put by money, while supporting his wife and children in Warwickshire; that he invested it from time to time in land and houses; that in May 1602 he bought more than a hundred acres of arable land in Old Stratford parish, and was later in the same year making fresh purchases

in the town, as if preparing the way for his return after half a score more years. Whether he paid visits from time to time to his kith and kin in his old home; whether the relations between him and his wife were happy or the reverse—fortunately for Shakspeare's fame, happily also for ourselves—we cannot say, we can hardly even guess. Happy, most happy for us that the lust of the biographer has no field for speculating as to whether Shakspeare or his wife was "*most* to blame"; and perhaps for seeking to enhance our admiration for the poet by depreciating the character or conduct of the woman he had married. For not an anecdote, not a rumour has come down to us, to hint that he was other than a loyal husband; nothing even in that strangely misunderstood document, his will, to show otherwise than that here too he was one of the *sanest* of his time. For when his work was done, and the position of himself and family assured, he left London, at the height of his fame and in the full vigour of his powers, to live the life of a country gentleman, and to retain, as the will shows, the kindliest memory of his old friends, alike of Stratford and the Globe Theatre, London.

As the *Merchant of Venice* stands on the borderland between Shakspeare's first and second period, so *King Lear*—the date of which is about 1605—marks the transition from the second to the third. And as I enumerate the seven or

eight plays that distinguish this last period, I ask those to whom each new title conjures up so many happy memories and associations, whether this group does not suggest a tone or colouring wholly different from those of the two preceding. I give their dates in all cases as nearly as in the judgment of the best scholars they can be determined, without any pretension to be dogmatic in the matter: *Lear*, 1605; *Macbeth*, 1606; *Timon of Athens*, 1606 or 1607; *Coriolanus*, 1608; *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, and the *Tempest*, 1610 or 1611. I have said that the general quality or tone of feeling pervading a group of plays like this, and giving to them a unity of their own, is more trustworthy for those seeking to know Shakspeare through his works than is the study of any single play. For each play, we have seen, is so distinct from its companions: its own story, coming to its author from without, not originating with himself, at once gives such an individuality, and engenders such an individuality, that any single play, if sifted and searched, might even seem to contradict in particulars what we had inferred from some other play. It is safer for those who know and love them severally to think for the moment of the *group*, not the *individual*; I am disposed to borrow a euphuism, of recent coinage, and say, to become an "impressionist," and seize the general "atmospheric effects" of the group, apart from either characters or incidents in detail.

And as we apply this test what do we find—*Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, *Tempest*—what quality, temperament, or vein of sentiment is common to these most *dis*-similar masterpieces of invention? I need not say that I disclaim any originality when I observe that such a connecting link exists. It has been patent always to the Shakspeare student. Henry Hallam long ago seems to have been pointing to it when he wrote in his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe* that "there seems to have been a period of Shakspeare's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill-content with the world or his own conscience; the memory of hours misspent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited; the experience of man's worser nature which intercourse with unworthy associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches;—these, as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of Lear and Timon, but that of one primary character—the *Censurer of Mankind*." And Hallam goes on to specify, as types of this last character, Jaques in *As You Like It*, and the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, as well as the satirical language of *Lear* and *Timon*. Now it is not quite easy to trace here the following of Hallam's conclusions upon his premises. There are grounds for believing these premises to be just. That Shakspeare did suffer in his early days of theatrical life certain experi-

ences just enumerated, is probably true. That, in common with all thoughtful men, he had to grieve over many "hours misspent" is likely enough; and we have his own most instructive and pathetic confession—that confession which doubtless Hallam had in mind when he penned the words—made in his hundred and eleventh sonnet, where he bids his friend rebuke *Fortune*, "the guilty goddess of his harmful deeds"—"Fortune" who

> Did not better for my life provide
> Than public means which public manners breeds.
> Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
> And almost thence my nature is subdued
> To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.
> Pity me then, and wish I were renewed.

These often-quoted words do apparently point to the shame which a noble nature must needs take to itself when it finds a once keen moral sensitiveness becoming less keen by contact with the world. "Public means," that is to say, the "glare of the footlights" (an expression perhaps allowable, though as yet there were no glare and no footlights); the temptation to write, in a measure, for the public taste; the having to court and to receive public applause, and that face to face with the public, and yet to retain simplicity, modesty, unselfishness, and toleration of some rival who knew better how to condescend to the public taste;—"public means" may have bred in Shakspeare at one time of his life "public manners,"

of which he saw the ignominy while he felt their power. And it would appear as if, in Hallam's judgment, it was as a result of this contamination from public manners that Shakspeare's sympathies went for a while with the *satirical*, or even the *cynical*, contemplation of mankind. I must say that I read a different lesson in these facts. It was in a healthy mood, not an unhealthy, that Shakspeare conceived, and worked out, the character of the melancholy Jaques. It is very curious how the estimate of this character has always been largely determined in popular judgment by one famous and beautiful speech allotted to it, that of the "seven ages" (even as to many Portia is, in fact, represented by that about the "quality of mercy"). The "seven ages" seems so genuinely earnest, sympathetic, and tender that we lose sight of the fact that it is mainly a rhetorical *tour de force*, based upon a popular division of life into seven stages, quite well known in Shakspeare's day; and that, alas! even an eloquent sermon may not prove the preacher sound of heart and temper. No! Jaques does not represent Shakspeare, even the Shakspeare of a possible brief period of disgust or remorse. In Jaques—laughed at, detected, baffled (if you remember), by all the healthy-natured persons of the comedy—Shakspeare is condemning cynicism, not allowing it. Not here (with all deference to Mr. Hallam) is it with Shakspeare, that the "little touch of conscience makes him sour." With

Shakspeare, and men of kindred nature, the little touch of conscience makes *sweet.*

Now, of course it is obvious that at one period in Shakspeare's life, and it is the one we are now considering, a series of subjects was treated by him in which the leading characters are men who have suffered much (unjustly, as they believe) at the hands of their fellow-men, and who are driven thereby into an attitude of hatred and revolt. It is enough to name Lear, Timon, and Coriolanus. Each has to discover the truth told in Shakspeare's own touching lyric, that the tooth of the wintry blast is not so keen "as man's ingratitude." Each personage stands alone—nothing common to them but this. Lear, the aged king, from the first moment that we see him showing signs of senile dementia; a despot by nature, and that despotism, unrestrained, deepening into mania; and lastly, the final collapse of reason, under the real hardness of heart of two children, and the imagined indifference of a third. Then Timon of Athens, a generous but essentially poor and weak nature, indulging in that vainest of dreams, that gratitude can be won by giving, and that he who lavishes unworthily can evoke any worthy response in others. The cynicism that springs up full-armed upon this disillusionment is pronounced enough; but it is the cynicism of the character, not of that character's creator; a cynicism of which the root is abundantly laid bare; not (as in Jaques) to make it contemptible,

for Timon in his prosperous days had never been a Jaques—he loved his fellow-men, if "not wisely," only too well. His outburst of unreasoning spleen is made really to awaken our compassion :—

> The old Timon with the noble heart,
> That, deeply loathing, greatly broke.

And lastly, Coriolanus, the patrician, disgusted by the failure to win recognition from those to whom he had displayed an arrogance matching Lear's in extravagance, is driven into an excess of scorn through the ingratitude he was himself answerable for. In none of the "bitter words" uttered throughout these plays by man against his brother-man is there any reason to suspect that Shakspeare himself is speaking behind the mask ; for in none of these personages (I submit) is there sign that he sympathised in the attitude of these men thus out of harmony with their kind. Shakspeare is neither with Timon in his misanthropy nor with Coriolanus in his scorn ; however, in both cases, those qualities are magnificent and pity-compelling. That their author sympathised with the men themselves, in his all-embracing humanity, we can clearly see, for he had pity for human un-perfectness as well as for human suffering, and understood the inevitable connection of one with the other. And it is just this inevitable connection that (however brought about) does form the prominent theme of these last plays, and

imparts to them a unity of their own. It is the same in the comedies as in the tragedies; felt as strongly in *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale* and the *Tempest* as in the three great tragic creations just enumerated. The wrongs of Imogen, of Hermione, of Prospero, at the hands of others make the pathetic colouring of their respective dramas as obvious as do the wrongs of these three men, Timon, Lear, Coriolanus, though their wrongs are so largely due to themselves. *Suffering*, and all the compensating glories of tenderness, charity, forgiveness that spring up like flowers beneath its feet—it is *this* that constitutes a unity that cannot pass unobserved and unfelt by us. And it does mark, as Hallam pointed out, a deepening vein of sadness in the writer, though we may not agree with him as to the significance of that sadness. If Shakspeare can be judged at all from what he has left us, it is not from individual characters, but from the plays as a whole. It is not the sarcastic and misanthropic vein of Timon or Lear that tells us what the poet himself was feeling or thinking about mankind; but the sympathy that unmistakably envelops the whole drama—the attitude that the writer takes up, as thus shown, towards the creations of his fancy, the *lacrymae rerum* of the Roman poet—these unquestionably become more dominant in the themes he chooses. For whatever cause, Shakspeare, in these last years of his creative period, was drawn to the graver, sadder,

and deeper experiences and problems of human life. Was it that he himself felt he had entered upon this last period, and that it was the "beginning of the end"? Was it that

> The clouds that gather round the setting sun
> Do take a sober colouring from an eye
> That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality.

Who shall answer these questions? We must remain awhile content to notice the facts that suggest them.

I have said that we cannot separate Shakspeare's "manner" from his "matter," and that we cannot deal with his changes of style without relation to his changes of theme. And we inquire if the style, the poetry, of these last plays shows anything of a corresponding unity of its own. Well, in comparing the styles of any writer, especially a dramatic writer, in his various writings, there are many pitfalls for the critic, especially when some of these writings are much more familiar to him than others. For instance, I am sure that any one knowing *Hamlet* as well as most educated persons know it, turning to another play of the same period comparatively strange to him, might easily fancy the very English of the two plays very unlike. For the language of the one play, through familiarity, having long ago lost its initial difficulty or strangeness, has come to seem as natural as our own modern tongue; while that of the other, with its words and terms

and grammar still to be mastered, might seem all but foreign to us. Then again, as I have said, the very differences in the story to be treated, and the characters to be drawn, and the truths to be worked out, engender, of necessity, a certain difference of style, and even of vocabulary, tending to make any one play look different in this respect from its companions. But making due allowance for all these deflectors of our judgment, and still regarding the group rather than any one play, we must, I think, notice certain changes in the writer's diction, difficult to define, it may be, but unmistakable to ear and sense. Nothing of the "redundancy of fancy" that characterised Shakspeare from the day he published his first long poem, nothing of that *inexhaustibleness* that I noticed in my first lecture, has deserted him. There is no change of style attributable to falling-off in *invention*, in copiousness of thought and the word expressing it. The exuberance of dialogue in *Coriolanus*, for example, is as manifest as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, although so different in kind. In reading either we understand afresh what Ben Jonson meant by saying of his friend and brother dramatist that "Sometimes he wanted the *curb* rather than the snaffle—he wanted 'holding in.'"[1] It is still, as at the beginning, the most prolific creative genius the world has seen who is at work; but the redundancy has changed its

[1] ["*Sufflaminandus erat*, as Augustus said of Haterius." See the passage in Ben Jonson's "Discoveries," *De Shakespeare nostrati*.]

quality. No longer is it the redundancy of poetic fancy, wit, and gaiety of heart; it is the outpouring of profound and yet excited feeling; of thought hurrying upon thought, as billow follows billow on the seashore. It is here that, when so much else has changed, we recognise that the hand is the same hand, although the nature which directs and controls it may have reached yet another stage of moral purpose. To attempt to illustrate such difference, to pit the style of this period against the style of twenty years earlier, proclaims itself absurd as soon as we put it in practice; you would justly think so, if I read a passage from a speech of Coriolanus and then one of Biron's. We should expect to find the difference. If *Love's Labour's Lost* is obscured by excess of *fancy*, *Coriolanus* is obscure through excess of *thought* (and through *stress* of thought—the wrestling of the writer with the deep and the complex feelings he would give utterance to); the superabundance of thought even overflowing on to the very servants in Aufidius's kitchen (like crumbs from a rich man's table), for it is one of these who, speaking to his fellow-servant of the merits of Peace and War, says, "Peace makes men hate one another"; to which the other makes the profound reply: "Reason, for then they less *need* one another."

I placed *Timon of Athens* in my lecture-paper as a play typical of this period, not certainly as a favourite play, or as the equal of either *Coriolanus*

or *Cymbeline*, but because of its marking the very excess of the sterner, gloomier side of a human frailty deepening into insanity. The very unpleasantness of this excess, I think, deters readers, besides the unequal quality of the play, due to the circumstance that, by general agreement of all Shakspeare scholars, other hands than Shakspeare's are traceable in it. The story of Timon already was a favourite topic in story and play; and whether Shakspeare "wrote up" an existing play, or whether he wrote certain scenes, leaving others to finish, is uncertain; but of the divided authorship there can be little question. There is, almost inevitably, from the nature of Timon's malady, an excess of "scolding" in the play; and there are two cynics in the play (wonderfully contrasted)—one Apemantus, the cynic by profession, and the other Timon, made cynical by his own disillusionment, both revilers in their turn; and the climate of the play is stormy, relieved indeed by passages of excellent humour, which if not Shakspeare's, it is hardly possible to ascribe to any other known hand; for still, as at the beginning, there were more in that age to emulate Shakspeare in his tragic verse than in his humorous prose. There are three distinct types of parasite in this play, who, having taken all they could get from Timon in the day of his wealth, turn their backs on him without a blush at the first hint of his tribulation—the man who, with cynical frankness, avows that he always knew Timon to be a fool; the hypocrite,

who is so *very* sorry that unfortunately his own balance at the bank is so very low; and the third, yet more consummate in his effrontery, who (and how true to life it is!) affects to be so hurt in his feelings that Timon did not apply to him *first* (the two former gentlemen having already declined assistance) that he cannot see his way, consistent with any self-respect, to offer any help at all.

And now we come to the two dramas that stand last in our catalogue—for they stand last in the order of writing—the *Winter's Tale* and the *Tempest*, both belonging approximately to the year 1610. They rank, you know, as comedies, and yet the interest of both is so serious and so pathetic, it seems all but profane not to rank them in a class apart. For here, though the "storm and stress" and the persistent sternness of the plays we have just been considering are absent, yet there is much to place them in the same group—again a unity of subject, *suffering*—injury received at the hands of those near and dear to us, from whom was to be expected treatment so different—this is still the theme that fascinates the poet in comedy as in tragedy. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen wronged by her too-credulous husband; in the *Winter's Tale*, Hermione the victim of hers, and Perdita involved so long in the same calamity; in the *Tempest*, Prospero cast forth to perish by his ungrateful brother. In all these stories too there is another link, that "the soul of goodness in things evil" is indeed "distilled out" and made to

sweeten the entire play: *forgiveness*—wrong received and wrong forgiven—this halo hangs over one and all. Much of the obscurity, the difficulty of thought struggling for expression, that we have noticed in the preceding plays of the period, is found in certain scenes, but in others the effect upon us is as of a fair evening after rain and gloom. The *Tempest*, as you are aware, has long passed for the very latest of Shakspeare's plays. No doubt this may be so, for it is beyond all question one of the latest, though by the irony of fate it happened to be printed first in the folio of 1623, and by consequence has almost invariably been allowed the same place in all subsequent editions of Shakspeare. Then, too, its supremacy (even among its companions) as a feat of pure imagination naturally favours the idea that anything after it would be an anticlimax; and lastly and chiefly, students of Shakspeare have always read in Prospero a type of that greater enchanter to whose magic he himself was due, and who with this play buried his wand, "deeper than ever plummet sounded," never to use it more. But while these conclusions are as pleasing as they are probable, the companion drama, the *Winter's Tale*, stands close by its side; and if it were proved that with this drama Shakspeare ceased to write, could we find it in our hearts to wish it otherwise? Is there any sweeter, more enchanting, picture of human life, any more skilfully-wrought-out story, any image we would

rather retain in memory as our latest glimpse of Shakspeare—his heart, his mind, and his poetry?

There may be, and is, difference of power in this play from that shown in his earlier dramas, but most assuredly no falling-off. And it so happens that we have once more the opportunity of testing what Shakspeare could make out of material most unpromising. Like *As You Like It*, the *Winter's Tale* is built upon a prose pastoral novel, and this time also written by a dramatist and poet contemporary with Shakspeare—Robert Greene. The story, like Lodge's *Rosalynde*, written in the current euphuistic vein of the day, is extant, and it is open to all to test Shakspeare's obligations to his original. It is not too much to say that while the outline of the legend—the jealousy of the king, the exposure of the infant child, and its preservation by shepherds, and ultimate recovery when grown to womanhood—is the same in both; all that makes the real beauty of the story is Shakspeare's, for the conclusion of the whole matter in Greene, including the death of the queen, the suicide of the king, and so forth, is crude and unpleasing in the extreme. We are thus able to test that continuance—that ever-perfecting of Shakspeare's strength—at the very moment when he was about to throw the cloak of his magic from him, saying, "Lie there, my art." In point of construction alone, this play seems to me the most perfect of all the comedies. The

series of incidents in the fourth scene of the fourth act, by which the escape of Florizel and Perdita is brought about, after the infuriated Polixenes has discovered himself to his son, is certainly one of the most ingeniously and effectively contrived in all Shakspeare; and here he owes absolutely nothing to Greene's novel of *Dorastus and Fawnia*. For, to begin with, remember the part that Autolycus, the vagabond, plays in that scene, and there is no Autolycus in Greene. Two leading characters, indeed, in the *Winter's Tale* are not in the original story; and here there is an instructive parallel with Shakspeare's other adaptation from Lodge's *Rosalynde*. In using that story, Shakspeare added two entirely new characters, Jaques and Touchstone; and you will remember that though these two characters stand, in a sense, *outside* of the main plot and action of the drama, yet, such is the part they play in the general effect, the play would be hopelessly maimed if they were absent. For the cynic Jaques is the necessary foil to the sweet, contented character of the exiled Duke, and Touchstone is the running chorus upon the pastoral artificialities of the theme. And now, again, Shakspeare makes the fortune of Greene's story for dramatic purposes by these additions of his own. Paulina, the true-hearted, faithful, common-sense lady, is the necessary foil to the brainless jealousy of Leontes (and he too is another type of the moral aberration merging by indulgence into mania); and Autolycus, though

in form merely the conventional clown or jester of the piece, is here made by Shakspeare, like Dogberry, not a mere jester *obbligato*, for he fills a necessary place in the development of the plot. It is interesting that in this all but latest play Shakspeare shows how entirely he has broken with the past in this matter of low-comedy characterisation. In his character, antecedents, and (I am afraid) ambitions, Autolycus is not a person to be emulated. He is essentially the "comic rogue,"—a stock character of the pre-Shakspearian drama, the "vice" of the morality—and yet how individual, how natural, how essential to the best interests of the story! In his frankness, his impudence, his versatility, his all but genuine lamentation that circumstances will not allow him a chance of being honest, has anything so delightful, and yet so morally harmless, ever since been conceived? Nothing in the first freshness of Shakspeare's comic invention twenty years before is richer than the appearance of Autolycus, turned pedlar, among the dairy-maids and the sheep-shearers in that perfect pastoral, the fourth act of this play.

Then there is the young boy Mamillius; and as to the consummate skill with which his half-dozen sentences are made to bring before us the whole child-character, not even the emphasis of Mr. Swinburne seems too emphatic.[1] And lastly, there is Perdita, to whom Shak-

[1] [*A Study of Shakespeare*, p. 222.]

speare has allotted perhaps the loveliest blank verse even he ever produced.

> O Proserpina,
> For the flowers now, that frighted thou let'st fall
> From Dis's waggon! daffodils,
> That come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
> But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
> Or Cytherea's breath.

We cannot be offended because, brought up in the shepherd's home, she yet knows so much about the loves of the heathen gods and goddesses. For remember that in Shakspeare's day the incidents and personages of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (the most popular story-book of the Renaissance) were as familiar to Shakspeare's audiences as the incidents and personages of his own best-known plays are to us; and the names and sad fortunes of Ganymede, or Endymion, or Danaë, were as quickly understood and appreciated as among us the adventures of the Master of Ravenswood or Diana Vernon.

But we must pause. Enough, I think, has been recalled to you to show what I mean when I say that the climate of the play, as of all of this period, is *autumnal*. And when I described this last seven years of Shakspeare's art as autumn, it was to this I pointed, rather than to the autumn season of Shakspeare's own life. And in saying this, I claim to be neither sentimental nor fanciful. What I point to is a real

thing—real to feel, if difficult to define. It is a quality in the light of the sun; in the colouring of nature; in the graver thought appropriate to that season of "calm decay," as contrasted with the buoyancy and forward-looking of spring. Not decay in any sense of *failing power*. The power of mastery over material, of mastery over metrical effect, and of all the worthier secrets of a dramatist's skill—situation, variety, and climax, in addition to that more beneficent secret of touching the heart and enlisting sympathy for goodness, and pity for suffering—had never been shown in larger measure than in this play, in which Shakspeare may be said to have said his last word to his fellow-men.

Concerning Shakspearian criticism, and it is prone to run riot nowadays, the old jest may with real truth be repeated, that much of it is *new*, and much *true*; but that for the most part what is *true* is not *new*, and what is *new* is not *true*! In these desultory lectures I have sought at least to avoid what is *new*. I have neglected altogether the topics which seem most to fascinate young "Shakspeare societies"—such questions as whether Shakspeare meant Sir Toby Belch for Ben Jonson, or (what would do equally well) whether he meant Sir Oliver Martext for Richard Hooker. I am speaking to those perhaps who do not join such associations, who mostly read these plays for their own profit and delight—"alone, the world" (and Shakspeare societies)

"shut out"! I have pointed out how we cannot evolve Shakspeare out of his writings, just because the dramatic method is the very antithesis of the autobiographical. But although this method serves to keep Shakspeare concealed from us, in a way that is often tantalising in the highest degree, and though the absence of information from without concerning what sort of man he was makes us yet more despondent in our ignorance, still there is no need for us to exaggerate that ignorance. We know a great deal more about our author than those persons allege who are for persuading us that he did not write his own plays. It always suits such persons, remember, to minimise, and even ignore, the unquestioned facts that we possess; and by always harping on that string they sometimes make easy converts among those not better informed. Only a few days since I heard a gentleman, perhaps with *Hamlet* and *Lear* deep in his heart, murmuring, "A Warwickshire peasant! a Warwickshire peasant!" No doubt the contrast is very effective, if it were based upon fact, but it is not. In no sense of the term, or of what the term implies, was Shakspeare a peasant. His father was not a peasant, and the son got his education (for he could have got it nowhere else!) attending for six or seven years one of the best country grammar-schools then in England. There is no antecedent difficulty as to Shakspeare writing Shakspeare's plays, given the primary

condition (and there we enter the realm of mystery indeed!) of the genius which is born, and cannot be acquired. Half a dozen years of school; half a dozen years of intimate contact with the poetry and poets of the most astounding age in English literature; and with the world of soldiers, statesmen, travellers, scholars, and thinkers around him; and the "quiet eye" to make all these its harvest-ground; what more *should* be wanted to equip the man who through his imaginative art is to move mankind?

No! there are difficulties and disappointments enough in searching out Shakspeare without adding to them by sophistical arguments from outside. We should carry with us all the knowledge we indubitably possess to help that other mode of study we have been considering. Without any assumptions beyond what that knowledge permits, we may enter upon our inquiry. We have watched a young poet, all on fire with native inspiration and the emulation of his fellows, after testing his hand by a magnificent experiment in other verse, beginning as dramatist—starting, no doubt, from the level that his fellows had attained; starting from their weaknesses as well as their strengths; starting from the literary customs and fashions of the day, or of the masters and models that had most allured him. We have watched him dallying with the very fashions he was to do most to discredit, turning upon them the whole blaze of his wit and fancy. We

have watched him discovering one by one his powers. He had received from the hands of his contemporaries a drama, at its best crude. From one of these, Marlowe, he had received the gift of a metre, blank verse, on which Marlowe had impressed such a seal of individuality that its success as the dramatic metre of the future was thenceforth secure. We follow Shakspeare's use of this metre—from the first, musical and eloquent, yet monotonous and limited in its uses, but growing every year in freedom and variety. We note the gradual disappearance from the plays of the lyric element in their verse (save and except in the interspersed songs, and they—as witness the *Tempest*—remain unique and unapproachable to the end). We note the blank verse proving itself not the less beautiful and impressive, but far more so, for the loss of that floridness which at first may have seemed its beauty, showing yet once again how the "half may be greater than the whole." We have gone on to note how the verse, or the author, rose to meet every greater theme and issue presented to him; and how fashion and precedent ceased to dominate as the more potent voice of deep human interests asserted its authority. And lastly, we mark a change coming over the very climate of Shakspeare's drama. A series of plays, greater as a whole than anything that has gone before, marks the last stage of his working life—*Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, the *Tempest*, and

the *Winter's Tale.* A ripening to the very end; ripeness in the choice of theme, in the imaginative treatment, in the skill of the development, in the versification, in the depth of the philosophy, in the human pathos and sweetness that bathes each drama in an atmosphere of its own. And after this, no more! Nothing follows this autumn. We might, but for one line, apply to this our singer, Logan's beautiful lines to the cuckoo:—

> Sweet bird, thy bower is ever green,
> Thy sky is ever clear;
> There is no sorrow in thy song,
> No winter in thy year.

There is no winter in Shakspeare's year, but always (and it deepens towards the close) there is sorrow in his song, and it gives to that song its peculiar and imperishable charm.

And if there is warrant for all we have been noticing—if I have rightly interpreted the effect of his successive plays upon the general reader—I would urge that we have learned much about Shakspeare that is of rarest value. We may possess but a handful of facts about his private life: we dare not identify him with this or that character in his dramas; but still he does reveal himself to us in those dramas. It is a real man that we note there, and he may become, as we study him, ever more real and more a friend to us as we test this reality. For we feel that we are in contact with a life and a growth. It is

a living personality, having the same affections, organs, senses, even as we common men. He would not be one jot more real to us if all the facts of his domestic history had been collected and transmitted by some gossip-collector of his day, and if we were able to pronounce with confidence on the conduct of that odious Ann Hathaway who inveigled a mere boy into so deplorable a marriage.

And as we take our leave of Shakspeare, quitting so early the stage, and the drama, and all the harassments of public life, to turn once more, "like the cony, to the place where he was kindled"—to the family, the friends, the neighbours, the simple interests and duties of his native town—then, after some four years, to end in quietness his life, it is allowable once again to ask in the latest words of our own Laureate—

> What sight so lured him thro' the fields he knew
> As where earth's green stole into heaven's own hue,
> Far—far—away?
> What sound was dearest in his native dells?
> The mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells
> Far—far—away.

THE ETHICAL ELEMENT IN SHAKSPEARE

ALTHOUGH with a natural reluctance to introduce a personal reminiscence into my lecture, I still feel that I must explain how this lecture came to be written. Some two years since it fell to my lot to contribute to the first number of my friend Mr. Lathbury's new journal, the *Pilot*, some remarks on Mr. Stephen Phillips's Tragedy, *Paolo and Francesca* (founded, of course, on the immortal episode in Dante's *Inferno*). Dante had treated the theme, as he treated all such, from the one Christian and Catholic standpoint. The crime of the lovers, that is to say, was regarded as "sin," and as incurring the dread punishment of sin. In using the subject for dramatic purposes, the purely didactic treatment was, from the nature of the case, impossible. But what, as I ventured to think, repelled the reader in Mr. Phillips's drama was that, though dealing with a tragedy arising out of the profoundest temptations and sorrows of poor human nature, he had all but entirely omitted the moral element

altogether. The very existence of a moral law, or even of a moral sense, seemed ignored. And I went on to contrast this method with that of Shakspeare. I did not take this course for the superfluous purpose of contrasting the general merits as a dramatist of Shakspeare and Mr. Phillips, but simply as contrasting their respective attitudes towards the personages in their plays, out of whose characters and acts the plots of those plays were developed. And I submitted that though a dramatist, never speaking in his own person but always in the person of his characters, cannot express directly his own opinion of them and their actions, still, in the instance of Shakspeare, the poet's treatment of his theme never left in the reader or spectator any reasonable doubt as to where the author's sympathies lay. I contended that in all of Shakspeare's maturer dramas the existence of the moral law and the moral sense was never lost sight of; and indeed pervaded, and gave its chief interest and charm to the play as a whole.

For taking this line I was taken to task by critics, who maintained that such reasoning is beside the mark. Both methods—Shakspeare's and Mr. Phillips's—it is urged, are equally legitimate; although, as one critic was bold enough to say, Shakspeare's method was in fact only carried off by his prodigious genius, and in any lesser poet would have been intolerable. Mr. Phillips's school of tragic drama, we were reminded,

is that of Maeterlinck, not of Shakspeare. It is his business to "adorn a tale," but not to "point a moral," directly or indirectly. In treating dramatically Dante's famous story of the unhappy lovers, he has nothing to do with the innocence or guilt—still less with the righteousness or sin—of the principal actors. All he had to do was to show with truth and skill, and also with all available poetic adornment, how the web of destiny was woven round them, and how a power they could not control was driving them on to the fatal end. "What," it was asked, "can Canon Ainger want more? Does he want the poet to have appended a moral to the play, pronouncing his own judgment on the characters? Or would he have liked moral sentiments to have been placed here and there in the mouths of the characters themselves, whereby the same end might be attained?"

I hope I have not unfairly represented the attitude of at least one of my courteous opponents. Another, a very distinguished journalist and editor, has suggested that probably, and naturally, clerical bias is answerable for my opinions. But I can honestly say that I did not arrive at those opinions by that path. When I had read *Paolo and Francesca*, with sincere admiration for its many notable qualities, its mostly pure and eloquent verse, and its dramatic skill, I found myself asking at the end, Why is it that, having satisfied my curiosity as to the author's treatment

of his subject, I do not feel as if I had anything further to study in the play? Why is it, for me at least, that the drama fails in *charm*? One recalls Shakspeare's treatment of the fate of two unhappy lovers—a fate equally tragic, equally heart-rending. The difference in the final effect as a whole upon the reader in *Romeo and Juliet*, and in *Paolo and Francesca*, is it due simply and entirely to Shakspeare being the greater poet—the more consummate master of dramatic effectiveness?

It was the asking of such questions, and the attempt to answer them, that prompted me to write as I did. And I did my best to make it impossible that I should be so far misunderstood as to provoke the questions just cited. I certainly did not complain that the dramatist did not append any moral of his own. For I cited Shakspeare as my example, and I need not say that he never employed such artifice. Æsop's *Fables*, as we read them in our youth, were furnished with such tags. And in the jest-books current in Shakspeare's day—such as the *Hundred Merry Tales*—each humorous anecdote commonly ended with the words, "Whereby you may see" that so forth, and so forth. But this resource is impossible in the drama. And if it were possible, it would only injure that illusion, which is the first condition of dramatic effect. For the object of the drama is to "hold the mirror up to Nature"; and in human life there is no one to

stand up and pronounce sentence—from outside. This resource is not, therefore, at the dramatist's command.

Again, the distribution of didactic moral sentiments among the *dramatis personæ* is equally impracticable, and would be equally destructive of illusion. We do not in real life become like Mr. Joseph Surface in the comedy, and deliver abstract sentiments upon every occasion that presents itself. Sir Peter Teazle expressed once for all, in trenchant language, the opinion of all reasonable persons on such a habit. If the author must not stand apart and speak the moral, and if there is not, as in the Greek drama, a chorus to keep up a running commentary on the situations as they occur, neither must the characters step, as it were, out of the canvas and the frame to enforce a moral.

"But" (you may reply) "as a matter of fact the characters in Shakspeare do utter moral sentiments from time to time, sentiments of rare pathos, spirituality, and beauty, expressed in language of such charm that they have long ago passed into our everyday speech as proverbs or maxims, and are used habitually by thousands who are unaware whose morality they are enforcing and in whose language." This is of course true. I could take up half your time on this occasion by citing such passages—reminding us, for instance, how prone we are to "give to dust that is a little gilt more laud than gilt o'er-

dusted";[1] or that "spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues,"[2] and that "Heaven doth with us as we with torches do, not light them for themselves."[3] There are scores and hundreds of such moral apophthegms in Shakspeare, for which we owe him eternal gratitude. And yet we should one and all scout the suggestion that these are lugged in by the dramatist, either as bids for popular applause or to convey the moral lesson which he (the author) wished to convey. One reason why they touch and impress and move us is that in the position which they occupy in the drama they are dramatically appropriate. They are the "criticism of life" which the circumstances of the moment naturally evoke from the personage who utters them. They are not only essentially true as maxims or reflections, they are artistically and dramatically true. They do not (to borrow yet another phrase from Sheridan) "encumber the soil which they cannot fertilise." They do fertilise the soil, and that is why they are never superfluous.

Shakspeare, it may be said with confidence, never preaches. Sometimes, no doubt, his characters are constrained to do so by the circumstances in which they find themselves. Isabella is compelled to preach to the "precise Angelo," when pleading for her brother's life—and a noble sermon it is. Portia has to preach to Shylock,

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, iii. 3. 178.
[2] *Measure for Measure*, i. 1. 36. [3] *Ibid.* i. 1. 33.

when urging on him the divine duty of forgiveness. And I am aware that there are many excellent persons who find comfort in these two incidents, as justifying them in accepting this otherwise pagan play-writer and play-actor as having some few signs of grace in him. They will point to such, and a few similar passages where the allusions to Christian ethics are too obvious to deny, as justifying the claim that Shakspeare is a religious poet. And yet this is to place that claim upon a very doubtful foundation. The utterance by any writer, even when it is appropriate and decorous, of religious or moral sentiments, or of what are called "beautiful thoughts," proves very little as to the opinions and temperament, still less as to the moral attainments, of the utterer. I remember some very wise remarks on this point by the late Mr. Coventry Patmore, who was at least as good a critic as he was a poet. He was combating the prevalent doctrine that we have nothing to do with the private character or opinions of a poet, that our business is only with the teaching of his poetry, and that it is all nonsense to revive the old dictum that a good *poet* must first be a good *man*. Coventry Patmore goes on to insist, and in my judgment rightly, that we are, in fact, whatever our theories on this head, affected in our estimate of some beautiful and touching thought by our acquaintance with the personality of the author of it; and

he cites, by way of illustration, Wordsworth's familiar lines :—

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Byron, says Mr. Patmore, might well have been the author of these lines. The sentiment of them is entirely within his reach, and he was quite capable of utilising it, had it occurred to him. But, supposing that it had appeared in one of his poems—*Childe Harold* or another—would it have affected our imagination and evoked the kind of response in our hearts, and have dwelt there as an abiding comfort and monitor as it has done, since it came to us from Wordsworth? And Mr. Patmore's answer is that it would not, and for this reason, that in spite of our theories we do ask ourselves as we read whether such a sentiment is *sincere*, whether it is grounded, that is to say, in the real character, and the real experience, the real aim and bias, of the writer, or whether it is merely employed by him as a popular and effective sentiment. And that this argument is sound we must all, I think, agree. We do in fact pronounce that in one writer to be "claptrap" which in quite a different writer comes to us with value, as part and parcel of his life's message.

Therefore, concerning the moral sentiments propounded in Shakspeare, they cannot, if separated from their context, be taken as other than

very true and beautifully expressed maxims. They could not in themselves constitute Shakspeare's moral worth as a dramatist any more than do such maxims in the mouth of Polonius show him to have exhibited moral wisdom in his life, or than the teaching of the Book of Proverbs proves Solomon (if he be their author) to have been *personally* a model of excellence and wisdom. It is not, therefore, by the abundance of and beauty of the gnomic utterances of Shakspeare that we are to gauge the ethical element in his writings. Many persons, as I have already said, are of a different opinion. His moral sentiments have been from time to time culled and collected into anthologies. And as, you remember, when one such was presented to a wise humourist as the *Beauties of Shakspeare*, he is said to have retorted, "Where are the other nine volumes?" His jest was wiser than it seems. The true and vital beauty of Shakspeare does not lie in these excerpts. It lies in his attitude towards human life as a whole: in the development of human character, and of human destinies arising out of such character. Erase from Shakspeare "The quality of mercy is not strained,"[1] or "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us,"[2] or "There is some soul of goodness in things evil,"[3] or any of the hundred such that will flock to your memory. We should

[1] *Merchant of Venice*, iv. 1. 184.
[2] *King Lear*, v. 3. 170. [3] *Henry V.* iv. 1. 4.

be incalculably the poorer for the loss of these. But their omission from the dramas would not alter the moral complexion of those dramas. For it is shown in profounder ways: not in their detachable ornaments, but in their organic unity.

It is by this organic and consistent unity that we are really to estimate the value of the ornaments—whether they are real pearls or imitation, diamonds or paste. In the case cited by Mr. Patmore it is not because we know Wordsworth's private life, and also Byron's, that we presume to judge the respective sincerity of their moral teaching. Even if we knew nothing of either one or other, we should find ourselves passing the same judgment: because, in studying a poem, or indeed any work of imagination, we insensibly, but quite justly, compare parts with the whole; and if the parts fail to correspond to the whole, we look on them with suspicion. A beautiful and profound reflection in Wordsworth we unconsciously compare with Wordsworth as a whole, *i.e.* as exhibited in the great body of his work; and the same with Byron. When we are moved by a profound thought in Wordsworth it is because we have the best reason to believe it sincere; and this reason is to be found in the whole body of his extant poetry. It is impossible to mistake the general aim of that poetry, and the uniform nature of the moral emotion that everywhere and always possesses him. We have thus an absolute justification for accepting a thought

or sentiment as being true to the writer's innermost nature. No doubt also we insensibly think of Wordsworth's long and retired life—content to think and muse and ponder, and learn amid rural solitudes the lessons of Nature—human as well as all other—content with comparative poverty, and with the neglect or contempt of the critics and the so-called lovers of poetry in his day, because he was conscious of the sincerity of what he wrote, and was strong in the belief that sooner or later the principles on which he wrote would be recognised and approved.

Now, in the instance of Shakspeare, this last standard of comparison is denied us. Apart from what we learn of his character from his works we know almost nothing of it. Mr. Sidney Lee has lately brought to a focus all that we really know of Shakspeare, and it is more, far more, as regards the course of his outward life and the story of his literary development than many good people have imagined, who supposed that it was quite open to them to propound some new theory as to the authorship of the dramas. But apart from one apparently undeniable incident of his earliest days of wedlock—a story of a poaching *escapade* when he was little more than a boy—and a few most uncertain inferences from certain of his sonnets—what is there that we know for certain of his conduct or his moral or religious opinions as a private citizen? He worked hard and saved money, and invested his savings in property in

London and Stratford, and was able to retire, while still in full strength of body and of mind, to his native town. It is something to know this, no doubt. It is something to know that the man with every temptation to share the reckless and extravagant habits of the Bohemian poets and playwrights of the time worked and made provision for himself and family by means, as far as we know, entirely praiseworthy. But we cannot set the moral utterances placed in the mouths of his characters side by side with incidents in his own private life and cry, "What inconsistency, what hypocrisy!" or else "What sentimentality and clap-trap!" We cannot call in Shakspeare's private history to confirm or to depreciate the moral teaching of his poetry.

Neither, as we have seen, can we separate the utterances of his characters from their connexion with their speakers and with the plot, and say authoritatively: Shakspeare thought so-and-so, or taught so-and-so. Partly because they are dramatic utterances; partly because a skilful sentimentalist can often obtain credit for utterances which are not really his own. Where, then, are we to look for evidence that these utterances are characteristic of the writer himself? We must do this, I submit, by a survey of his dramas as a whole—by what they reveal to us of the mind of the author, conceiving and evolving the development of a moral order in the conduct and fortunes of his characters. We can only safely do this by

noting the impression left on us by each play as a whole. Forgetting for the time being the beautiful details of the drama—the exquisite poetry of certain passages, or the truth of particular reflections, let us seek to analyse the effect each play produces on us when regarded as a page torn from the volume of human history. Whether it be *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* or *Lear*; *As You Like It*, *Much Ado about Nothing*; *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline*, or *Winter's Tale*, it will, as it recurs to memory, leave in our mouths a taste quite distinct from our admiration of its poetry, its construction, or even its characterisation. I am certain that all who are intimate with their Shakspeare will understand and assent to this. And what is this *flavour* that Shakspeare leaves upon the palate—whether it be comedy or tragedy with which he is dealing, whether the interest be serious and pathetic, or whether it be fantastic and humorous? I think we must admit that the flavour has to do with moral sweetness and beauty rather than with any intellectual and æsthetic attractiveness—supposing that we can safely separate these things from each other; and this moral beauty one connected with the fates and fortunes of the various personages, as originating with and controlled by their respective characters, or the characters of those surrounding them. Take *Romeo and Juliet*—a play, as I have said, so far parallel with Mr. Phillips's drama that its deepest interest lies in the career and the sad end of two deeply

attached lovers. We can imagine safely, I think, how Mr. Phillips, or other dramatists of to-day, would have chosen to treat the theme. We should have been led to note the *fatefulness* of the drama, how from first to last the unhappy pair were immeshed in a net against which it was vain to struggle—wound round in the toils of Fate—the old Greek Ἀνάγκη, or Necessity, a power against which even the gods are powerless. But it is safe to say that this is not the effect produced on us by Shakspeare's treatment. We recognise, on the contrary, that homelier law of necessity which says that what a man sows that he shall reap. Think of the miserable state of things that exists in the beautiful city of Verona —the wretched hereditary feuds between families, causeless, unreasonable, and unreasoning; the idle, talent-wasting frivolity of the young and fashionable—these are the toils in which the lovers are caught. It is man's folly and short-sightedness that brings about the misery of so many. Charles Lamb, who most assuredly was neither a puritan nor a sentimentalist, nor given to preaching, cannot help drawing the moral when he tells over the immortal story once again for children. Referring to the last words of the drama, he says: "So did these poor old lords [Montague and Capulet], when it was too late, strive to outgo each other in mutual courtesies; while so deadly had been their rage and enmity in past times, that nothing but the fearful over-

throw of their children (*poor sacrifices* to their quarrels and dissensions) could remove the rooted hates and jealousies of the noble families." Such indeed is the moral, or, at least, *one* moral, of the drama. But Shakspeare himself never tells us so. He does not come forth at intervals in morning dress and hat in hand to address the audience, like a Drury Lane manager. Neither does he put the moral into the mouth of any one of his characters acting as chorus. He can nowhere be said to be preaching oblique sermons ; and yet his readers hear and read these sermons in the very development of the story, and its fidelity to human life and human society. We talk with justice of the lifelikeness of Shakspeare's characters. But it is not in that chiefly that his fidelity to truth consists. The characters might themselves be lifelike, and yet be represented as exercising an influence the very reverse of lifelike upon the actions of other characters and the ultimate issue of those actions. It is this which always seems to me a radical falsity of the modern drama. Its conception and depicting of character we may sometimes accept ; it is too often the perfectly arbitrary and inconsistent issues of such character that strike us as untrue, because based upon no true study of human life, and of the invincible sequels of human destiny, arising out of the primary law that "what is sown is reaped." We all have been tempted at times to make merry over the wholesale slaughter in the last scenes of

Hamlet. But a little reflection will teach us that such "indirect and crooked ways" as have led up to the final disasters—the atmosphere of crime, duplicity, conjugal inconstancy, that prevailed at the Court of Denmark—resisted only by one noble nature, handicapped by a weak will and an intellectual hesitancy, were bound to result (in a semi-barbarous age) in death and carnage involving innocent and guilty alike. The world is made so, and the drama, holding up the mirror to its life, must follow suit. Not otherwise with *Lear.* You will all of you remember how in an uncritical and an unspiritual age the caterers for the theatre put their "hooks" (it is Charles Lamb's phrase) into "the jaws of this Leviathan," and provided the play with a happy ending, marrying Cordelia and Edgar, and sending Lear into happy retirement to private life for the end of his days. In the noblest critical passage on Shakspeare ever written, Lamb has exposed the folly and the poor insight into life shown in such changes. "What," Lamb asks, —after such experience as Lear's,—"what was there for him but to die?"

Let us cite a comedy, where morals are not expected to be so obvious, omitting for the moment those into which the supernatural or the purely fantastic enters—such as the *Midsummer Night's Dream* or the *Tempest.* I take one which purports to represent possible incidents in real life, and in which no moral lesson—such as that of "mercy" in the *Merchant of Venice*

or that of "forgiveness" in the *Winter's Tale*—is inevitably prominent in the story. I take instead *Much Ado about Nothing*. There is much in this play which goes against the grain with us. The absurdity of the charge brought against Hero, and the weakness of the evidence on which it rests, strike us all. Perhaps we do not quite make allowance for the difference of customs and of amateur legal investigation in Shakspeare's day and our own. We feel sure that a detective from London would have made short work of the conspiracy of Don John and his friends. But then those days were not the days of Gaboriau and Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Besides, Shakspeare had to accentuate the credulity of Claudio and Leonato for the purpose of his story. By the title he gave his play, *Much Ado about Nothing*, he prepares the spectator's mind for a stupid *fiasco* made by some one. But his object was to show how easily persons may be deceived in other matters than believing a preposterous story against a lady's character. He had to show also how a true and most womanly woman may pass for a while in the superficial society of her lifetime as a mere utterer of smart sayings, and in the indulgence of her marked gift for *persiflage*, and yet, when the deeper feelings of pity and resentment against outraged justice are awakened, show herself something so different.

I might go on—and the temptation is very great—to cite such instances, for they are legion,

in all of Shakspeare's plays. And these instances are not interpolated: they arise naturally out of the circumstances of the play—the situations, the plot. However grotesque, however repellent, the plots of Shakspeare's plays may be, yet it seems as if, without his intending it, without being conscious of it, he sweetened them, and made them leave us the wiser and happier, and more in love with human goodness, at the end. This is very noteworthy. What it was that attracted Shakspeare in any story that came into his hands to be turned into a play is of course a mystery that can never be solved. But we might almost be justified in inferring that it was a mere chance whether he set to work upon a great and noble set of incidents or on one quite the reverse. In his great tragedies—in a *Hamlet*, a *Macbeth*, a *Romeo and Juliet*—he employed plays already written, or chronicle histories, or Italian romances, which might well have stimulated the imagination of any great poet qualified to deal with them. But what are we to say of such stories as those on which *Measure for Measure* was built, or *Cymbeline*, composed as they are of incidents that even now, for all that Shakspeare has done for them, we almost gladly forget when the curtain falls? Yet to both these plays we owe the inspiring example of two of the loveliest types of womanhood that poet ever drew—womanhood which not only passes unhurt through all trial and unstained by any of the degrading

associations among which it moves, but lifts the whole story on to a plane where we feel we are breathing a lofty air of humanity, and sympathy with all that there is in the world protesting against what is low and vile.

And this reminds us of a controversy lately arisen as to the relative importance to a drama of the plot and the characters. One critic, relying on Aristotle's *Poetics*, claims precedence for the former. Others, including such scholars as Mr. Courthope, Professor Butcher, and Mr. Andrew Lang, decline (as they say) to let Aristotle crush us with a single dictum. And indeed in the great drama of the modern world it is absolutely impossible to separate and distinguish between the two. In the Shakspearian drama the plot arises out of the characters of those who take part in it, and could not exist but for these. We proverbially laugh at the idea of the play of *Hamlet* with the part of Hamlet omitted. And the smile is more intelligent than we may think. It is Hamlet's character—his human affections, his scholarly temperament, his moral and intellectual hesitancy—that makes the plot. What is even the *Deus ex machina* of a ghost on a rampart without the determining influence of that one mental and moral individuality? Where is the plot of *Macbeth* without the conflict of two opposite human individualities in Macbeth and his wife? This is no critical subtlety; a thing for scholars and metaphysicians to fight over. No doubt the

course of much of the modern drama tends to obscure this truth, and pervert the judgments of modern audiences. An exciting plot, some good situations, and a few purple patches of poetry—these are enough to-day to constitute a masterpiece and secure a verdict of unanimous approval. But though fine feathers may make fine birds, fine passages do not make a fine play. It is the development of character, with its influence on other characters and on the circumstances among which it moves, that is the one worthy constituent of the drama that time preserves and justifies. And it is so far as a poet's attitude to his characters is a human attitude that he possesses the elements of a popularity and a fame that shall endure, and secures that when the fashions of his own age pass away he shall not pass away with them.

It is this quality of *humanity* which constitutes the supreme ethical virtue of Shakspeare and (be it in justice said) of the noblest of his contemporaries. It is not the poet's own ethical preaching; not the preaching of the good and virtuous personages of the play; not even the presence of good and virtuous characters themselves, that account for the final impression left on us by any one of his dramas as a whole. Nor is it, as I have said, any strict and invariable notion of "poetical justice." Of poetical justice, as that imbecile phrase is ordinarily understood, there is none in Shakspeare, or at least so little that some

foreign critics, and even critics at home, have thought good to scorn at the *dénouements* of some of the dramas, because the punishment lights often upon innocent and guilty alike. But of course this is just where Shakspeare's essential truth to Nature is made manifest. For just as the genial rain from heaven falls alike upon the just and the unjust, even so does the Nemesis of wrongdoing. Except in his fantastic comedies, where Shakspeare took a story as he found it, and did not think it worth while to change it, he shows nothing of the desire to make things pleasant all round, and reward his characters as the unthinking spectator would like to see them rewarded. Shakspeare, when he is dealing with the serious issues of life, never regards what the "barren spectator" (for whom he seems ever to have felt a well-grounded contempt) would like to have seen. The "barren spectator" likes "violent delights," such as the ultimate happiness of the suffering, and the ultimate punishment of the villain. He likes "sudden conversions," such as in real life do not occur. The tragedy that Nicholas Nickleby translated for Mr. Crummles contains the kind of episode that pleases the groundling. Mr. Lenville, who did their first tragedy, is delighted with the character for which he is cast. "You turn your wife and child out of doors, and stab your eldest son in the library. At last, in a fit of remorse, you determine to kill yourself. You have raised your pistol to your

ear, when the clock strikes *ten.* You pause—you remember to have heard a clock strike ten in your infancy. The pistol falls from your hand, and you become a virtuous and exemplary character ever afterwards." Mr. Lenville is delighted. "A sure card." "Get the curtain down on a touch of Nature like that, and it's a triumphant success." But Mr. Lenville was wrong, although he had had a long experience of what audiences like. It was not a "touch of Nature," but only the touch of a debased art; a concession to the vulgarest and most unthinking of tastes. Except in fairy-tales, men are not converted by hearing clocks strike ten. Mr. Dickens's *Christmas Carol* is probably the most delightful fairy-tale ever written. And in such a tale it is as legitimate as it is charming an effect that the long years of selfish parsimony should be exchanged in a moment for sweetness and generosity. But Shakspeare did not write moral fairy-tales, even when he took in hand a *Midsummer Night's Dream* or a *Tempest.*

Hamlet, in one of the most famous of his sayings, has told us that the purpose of acting "at the first and now, was and is, to hold the mirror up to Nature"; by which he means, of course, that Nature may see herself faithfully reproduced. This is said of acting, but it is also meant of the drama acted, for the actor's business is faithfully to interpret the drama. Now there are various methods of "holding up the mirror,"

or rather various ideas of the Nature to be thus reflected. The less educated audiences understand by it the art of showing them on the stage the various scenes that they are familiar with in the world. To represent, for instance, on the stage, Margate Sands, or Charing Cross, or a busy day on the Stock Exchange, with every detail attended to, will attract tens of thousands. I remember, many years ago, when at classic Drury Lane a real hansom cab was first brought upon the stage, what enthusiasm it evoked. And though this kind of realism is very crude, and properly condemned in literary and artistic circles, there are other kinds of realism which seem to be held quite legitimate. To reflect certain sections of modern society, to show smart people always making rude answers to one another (which is called "epigram"), and, of course, to make them sail very near the wind in indelicate allusion, this, because a fair transcript of a certain society of the day, is provided as the attraction of many modern comedies. But it is not of the outward life, or social manners of people, that Shakspeare was thinking. "Nature" with him meant "human nature," not any particular type or temporary garb that it wears. But he meant more than this. He meant the laws which govern human nature: the laws of cause and effect, of conduct and the consequences of conduct. To these it was his business to "hold up the mirror"; and unless he did so, how

was it possible that the characters he drew should appear other than either sentimental abstractions or grotesque and impertinent interpolations in the plot? Why have we not more Shakspeares born into the world? Why does generation after generation pass and no poetic dramatist of the same high rank ever appear? There was a very able and remarkable article in the *Quarterly Review* for July 1900, which I daresay many of you have read, entitled, "The Conditions of Great Poetry." Its general object was to solve the question I have just propounded — "Why are we waiting in vain for a second Shakspeare?" And the writer finds the answer in the position (not, of course, original with him) that the spirit of the present age is not favourable, and that if ever history repeats itself in this respect, the great Shakspearian quality will reappear among us, and the loftiest dramatic impulse England has ever known will produce for us the dramatist we long for. "Capacity for emotion," our reviewer says, must be assumed in the poet, but it will not be elicited from him unless it is "prevalent amongst those whom the poet addresses." Unless his convictions are shared by his contemporaries, the poet will become a didactic and missionary poet, if not a mere controversialist, eager to convert the world of readers to his opinions. If, on the other hand, the convictions belong to both the poet and his readers, then he will be led to exhibit life (as Shakspeare does) in the light

which such convictions throw upon it. Shakspeare lived in a great age "of great national expansion—political, religious, intellectual," the chains of ecclesiastical bondage had fallen off, and the eyes of men were opened to see things for themselves. It was still an age of Faith, but the soul of man was brought into freer, nearer communion with God; Hope was new born; new national developments had become possible; thought was free, but it was not irreligious—"the ethics of the old Catholicism, with its judgments of conduct and character, were almost as fixed and vivid for Shakspeare as they were for Dante." I would have you carefully to study this essay I am quoting from, for with much of it we shall all agree. Where I venture to differ from the writer is in this, that I think he obliterates *Individuality* too much, in his endeavour to show that it is the creation of the age it is born into. If all Shakspeare's contemporary poets showed, even in general outline, the qualities we note and admire in him, then a very strong case would be made out for this view. But is this so? Take, for example, the instance of Shakspeare's contemporary, Marlowe. By general agreement his verse was the finest ("Marlowe's mighty line," as Jonson called it) of the time, next to Shakspeare's. His power of conceiving and treating tragic situations was marvellous. Passages in his plays are of singular power and grandeur. But the ethical virtue of his dramas—

all that quality which should have come to him from the hopes, aspirations, new-born joys of his time—was missing. He had had a more thorough school and college education than Shakspeare; he was in no less close touch with the world of wits and scholars in London; but he was dissipated and profligate and defiantly anti-religious, and died in a tavern brawl. He had no humour, as far as is possible to discover, and no power, apparently, to conceive the beautiful or admirable in the female character. If it was the age that evoked what was finest and most characteristic in Shakspeare, why did it fail to produce something akin to it in Marlowe? Must not the answer be that it was not *there* in Marlowe to be evoked? Shakspeare's Iago was a scoundrel, and a pessimist, but surely he was right when he said, "'Tis *in ourselves*, that we are thus and thus." "The abysmal deeps of personality" will not bear to be neglected, I think, in our estimates of the sources of a poet's strength or weakness. If a man may be a pessimist in an optimistic age, might he not be an optimist in a pessimistic one? "Conduct," Matthew Arnold said, is "four-fifths of life"; in which saying, as I have said elsewhere, if he erred, it is only in omitting the other fifth. Can we, in judging of Shakspeare's greatness, neglect the fact that he had himself a dominating sense of the supremacy and the beauty of goodness, and that Marlowe (for example) was without it?

It is the profound ethical beauty of so many scenes that has fixed them "deep in the general heart of men." Without this quality there is, I believe, no permanent and enduring and universal popularity for the poetic, the serious drama. A fundamental sense of the sacredness of the moral issues treated is as much the key to the great tragedies of Greece as it is to those of Shakspeare. Without it, a play may indeed be tragic—full of terror and of pity—full of poetry which forces us to exclaim, "How exquisite it is!"—but it can never ally itself with the profoundest moral conscience of the reader, and can therefore never be secure of living on from age to age, with undiminished interest and never-fading lustre.

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF

I PROPOSE this evening to tell you the story of a very singular historical development, how the greatest humorous creation of Shakspeare grew out of something, on the first glance, as remote from it as possible; and by what a curious series of fatalities the popular tradition of a real person, and one noted chiefly for his connexion with a Protestant religious movement, was gradually modified into the witty and unscrupulous knight we all know so well. For it was one of the most famous followers of John Wiclif, Sir John Oldcastle, who is the undeniable origin of Sir John Falstaff. The outline of the story connecting the two is familiar to Shakspearian scholars, but it will bear telling over again, and I think you will not grudge my occupying my first ten minutes or so in a brief historical summary, seeing that I shall hope to show you later on how Shakspeare's character bears unmistakably in the grain of it certain ineffaceable marks of its origin.

Let me first briefly remind you of what history tells us of the real Sir John Oldcastle. He was

born in Edward III.'s reign, probably about the year 1360. Whether of Welsh origin or not, I cannot tell you, but his earlier military services were rendered in Wales and in the adjoining counties of England, and in 1406 we find him High Sheriff of Herefordshire. But in 1409 he made a very important and distinguished marriage. He married (as her fourth husband) the granddaughter and heiress of the wealthy and powerful nobleman Lord Cobham of Cowling Castle, near Rochester; and, after the usual custom, inherited the *title* as well as the *estates* of his wife's family, and in the twelfth year of Henry IV.'s reign (1411) was summoned to Parliament by the title, by which he came to be familiarly known, of Lord Cobham. Shortly after his marriage he went abroad on military service with the English army supporting the Duke of Burgundy in the French wars. He was thus, at the time that he first becomes a conspicuous person in English history, a man of some military reputation, and by wealth and rank a person of great importance.

Henry IV. died in 1413. His son Henry of Monmouth (the "Prince Hal" of Shakspeare's two historical plays) was then twenty-five. If the usual date assigned to Oldcastle's birth (1360) be approximately correct,[1] he would be at this time about fifty-three years of age, quite

[1] [*The Dictionary of National Biography* shows reasons for preferring a later date, c. 1378; it gives interesting details of the relations between Oldcastle and Henry V.]

sufficiently older than Prince Hal to have been a very dangerous example to that young man, had Oldcastle had any of the tastes and habits attributed to Falstaff. And we may well believe that Sir John Oldcastle was a friend and intimate of Henry of Monmouth. He was a tried and faithful servant of Henry IV. Walsingham, the chronicler, tells us that he was "dear and acceptable to the king for his honesty and worth." That, indeed, is the character he bore among his contemporaries. There is no fragment of contemporary evidence, or historical evidence of any kind, to support an opposite conclusion. There is no *shred* of evidence connecting the real Sir John Oldcastle with the fracas between Prince Hal and the Chief-Justice Gascoigne (first told by Sir John Elyot in his book the *Governour*), or with any of the other wild and regrettable passages of that prince's career.

On the contrary, so far from Oldcastle bearing the character of a man of lax morals and sensual tastes, he had already, during the life of Henry IV., made himself conspicuous in support of the cause of the reformer Wiclif — a cause which had for one vital purpose the purification of the Church from scandals in the lives of churchmen as much as from corruptions of doctrine. The Lollard was a Puritan, first and foremost; and there is no reason to doubt that Oldcastle's heart was as strongly in the moral cause of Lollardy as in the doctrinal. And at this

time (the accession of Henry of Monmouth to the throne as Henry V.) Lollardy was a *great fact.* Wiclif's translation of the Bible had now been many years in existence; and portions of it, copied and multiplied of course by hand, were being secretly read and discussed through the length and breadth of England. The Church was furious at this destruction of its monopoly of religious information. The gospel-pearl, the clergy said, was being cast forth and trodden by swine. The most cherished doctrines and practices of the Church were being denied and condemned; and it was evident that the time was come when Lollardy must be crushed out, or the monks and friars would find their power, and perhaps their existence, at an end. Oldcastle had been known to favour the new gospel—"Wiclif's Learning," as the priests called it—and immediately after the accession of Henry V. a synod of the bishops and clergy of England was summoned to St. Paul's Cathedral in London to deal with the spread of the Wiclif heresy. But one special object of this synod was to proceed against Oldcastle, who was then (to quote the words of Foxe) "noted to be a principal Favourer, receiver, and maintainer of them, whom the Bishops misnamed to be Lollards, especially in the Dioceses of London, Rochester and Hereford, setting *them* up to preach whom the bishops had not licensed, and sending them about to preach . . . holding also and teaching opinions of the

sacraments of images, of pilgrimages, of the keys and Church of Rome, contrary and repugnant to the received determination of the Romish Church."

Oldcastle was summoned to appear, and subjected to a long and rigorous examination, the records of which remain, and may be read in Foxe. Oldcastle made a bold and systematic defence: he drew up his creed, he gave his reasons for his opinions on image-worship and transubstantiation, and bore the insolence and brow-beating of his inquisitors as one who carried his life in his hand. When threatened that the Church could refuse him absolution, and being offered it by the Archbishop if only he would retract and submit, he refused all such terms, declaring that he indeed stood in need of Heaven's absolution, for that in his "frail youth," so he said, "he had offended most grievously in pride, wrath, and gluttony, in covetousness and lechery, but that to Heaven, and not to the Church, he looked humbly for forgiveness."

There could, of course, be but one end to this. Oldcastle was condemned as a heretic and thrown into the Tower. His opponents, being thus baffled in their design of making him submit his judgment to that of the Church, tried yet another plan of neutralising his influence and example to the common people. While he was in prison they published a recantation of his opinions, purporting to be drawn up by him. In no case could this have long served their turn, for after

a few weeks Oldcastle escaped (by means never ascertained) from the Tower, and took refuge in the fastnesses of his old familiar country of Wales. For five years he continued to elude his enemies. Meantime Chichely had succeeded Arundel as Archbishop, but the zeal for exterminating Lollards was in no way relaxed. Finally, a reward being set upon Oldcastle's head, Lord Powis, who held some high command in Wales, betrayed the unhappy man, who was removed to London, promptly declared a traitor to the king and realm, and a heretic against God, and sentenced to be drawn through the streets of London to the new gallows in St. Giles, and there hanged and burned. The sentence was carried out on the 25th of December 1417.

Such, then, was the life and death of the good John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham. There is no reason whatever to make him out a model character, either in his early private life or his methods of supporting the opinions of John Wiclif. He was probably a hot-headed and violent partisan, with more than the courage, the intemperance, of his opinions. From his rank and position he was the most famous Lollard, and the most formidable. He did not measure his language as to the shortcomings of the clerical order. He boldly said that the Pope was the *head* of Antichrist, the prelates the *members*, and to the friars he assigned even a less dignified part of the body politic. He could

expect little in return but hatred and exasperated scorn. He was specially odious to the mendicants, the preaching friars; and through them, during his lifetime and after his death, his character would certainly be represented with every unfavourable detail that belonged to it exaggerated to its utmost, and with every embellishment that the ecclesiastical spite could graft upon it.

Time went on—Lollardy became a thing of the past—though the influence of Wiclif could never have died in England, and still less the effect of his English version of the Scriptures. But the Church succeeded in keeping the memory of the name of Lollard odious. And as the reputation of the cause decayed, so would the reputation of those who had been identified with it. By what gradual process the popular idea of the good Sir John Oldcastle underwent transformation we know not. For nearly a hundred years from his death the nation was busy with the Wars of the Roses and many other things that distracted the public mind. There was always a more ardent company bent on keeping alive the unfavourable reputation of Oldcastle than of those who had any interest in defending his good name. I do not know of any apology for the life of Oldcastle being written till Bale, in 1544, claimed Oldcastle among those who had suffered as blessed martyrs for the Protestant cause, and published in full the proceedings of

Oldcastle's examination and defence. His account was twenty years later incorporated in Foxe's great work, the *Acts and Monuments* or *Book of Martyrs*. And indeed it was high time that some fairly accurate picture of the man should be given to the world; for at this juncture, or a very little later, the gradual manipulation of Oldcastle's personality by the spite of priests or the frolic fancy of the people had reached a very singular stage. The few facts out of which it had grown were just these: a knight (a Sir John Oldcastle), a soldier, of the time of Henry IV. and Henry V., presumably a companion of the latter while still Prince of Wales; in prosperity during the reign of the former king; falling into disgrace in the time of the latter—those few are the sole historic facts about the man that the public fancy had to work upon. But there seems to have been always a tradition (likely enough a true tradition) that he was *very fat*;[1] and if so, it is quite conceivable that the religious orders whom he had so bitterly denounced did not leave this occasion unimproved. Indeed, I have sometimes wondered whether a portion of the poor man's own confession, when before his adversaries, may not have been seized upon and made capital of to his disparagement; I mean that part of it where he confessed that he had in his youth offended grievously in pride and wrath, and

[1] [I am not aware of any reference to Oldcastle's fatness earlier than 1597, the date of Shakspeare's play.]

covetousness and gluttony and lechery, and hoped still humbly for forgiveness. Nothing more natural and likely than that these sacred words of humility should have been seized upon and made capital of by the basest of his enemies. Can we not fancy a wandering friar expounding the moral of this as he sat by the villager's fireside, where he was being made comfortable for the night? "A miserable man, my friends, by his own confession a glutton and a wine-bibber, and a man of most profligate life. HE professes to teach us sound doctrine, and to take away from the poor man his pilgrimages and his saint-worship, and all the comforts of his religion. This is the man, forsooth, who discovers that the clergy are not men of moral lives. Who is *he*, to slander his neighbours and to blaspheme against Holy Church? Why, my friends, you have but to look at him to see the effects of his wicked life. *What does that great fat paunch mean?* What *can it mean* but one thing—a career of gluttony and drinking of old sack and canary. But then the old king, you say, thought very highly of him, and employed him in positions and commands of great trust. Perhaps he did for a while—yes—and let him be the friend and companion of his son, the Prince. Well, my friends, you all know how that turned out. What sort of a man was the young Prince in those days? Was it not clearly the bad example and guidance of Oldcastle that made the Prince far worse

than he otherwise would have been? Besides, my friends, you see what happened when the Prince had sown his wild oats and came to the throne. The first thing he did on his accession was to let justice overtake this man. He had only been king a few weeks when the law was put in force against this hypocrite. The Church examined him and showed clearly that for all his pretensions he was a heretic and a traitor; and though he contrived by some treachery to escape his doom for a few years, the vengeance of Heaven was not to be balked, and he has just perished by a disgraceful death."

We can imagine Oldcastle's old enemies using this kind of language, and drawing these sorts of inferences, for the edification of the people after that memorable day in December 1417, when the good Lord Cobham was hanged and burned. And we can understand how, as the story was told over and over again for the next hundred and fifty years (and the friars had no other so eminent a personage with whom to point the moral of heresy and its righteous doom), it would depart more and more from historic truth, and get the ludicrous incidents, real or fictitious, more and more accentuated. The image of Oldcastle as a man of earnest religious opinions (however mistaken) and as a martyr in their cause would be allowed to become fainter and fainter, and the comic side of him would alone survive in the thoughts of the people. For it was a favourite

theory in the Middle Ages that the way to make wickedness odious was to make it *comic*. In the miracle and mystery plays, you may remember, the wicked characters—those whom the people were to be taught to loathe—were generally made ridiculous, even in the accidents of features and voice and dress. Pilate and Judas in the miracle play were held up to ridicule as much as to loathing, and the vice in the mystery play was invariably a comic character; not at all with any view to make light of sin, but in order thereby to make sin contemptible. Just so the fat knight Oldcastle would be sure to be made as ridiculous as possible for popular presentation; and at the time when Foxe printed his famous work there is good reason to know that there was current a popular conception of Oldcastle as a bloated old sensualist, a soldier and yet a coward, who had been the aider and abetter of an English prince in very objectionable practices, and who had very properly been thrown overboard by that prince when he came to the throne and awoke to a true sense of his duties as a king.

Let me quote two or three passages from writers of the seventeenth century in proof of this. There is extant a rare tract, published in London in 1604, called "The Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie, or the Walkes in Powles." The fat host of the ordinary addresses his guests in terms of welcome, when one of the number, one Signor Shuttlecock, breaks in with, "Now, Signiors, how

like you mine Host? Did I not tell you he was a madde round knave, and a merrie one too: and if you chance to talk of fatte Sir John Oldcastle, he will tell you he was his great-grandfather, and not much unlike him in paunch, if you marke him well by all descriptions." Again, in another pamphlet of a few years later, a character called *Glutton* declares: "I'm a fat man. It has been a West-Indian voyage for me to come reeking hither. A kitchin-stuff wench might pick up a living for the fat which I lose by straddling. . . . Sir John Oldcastle was my great-grandfather's father's uncle—I came of a huge kindred!" Now allusions such as these would fall flat unless they appealed to a very commonly diffused idea of the habits and attributes of Oldcastle. He was evidently still the typical fat man of the popular imagination. But other qualities than fatness were equally associated with the character. Fuller in his *Church History of Britain*, writing about Oldcastle, says: "Stage poets have themselves been very bold with, and others very merry at, the memory of Sir John Oldcastle, whom they have fancied a boon-companion, a jovial royster, and yet a coward to boot, contrary to the credit of all chronicles, owning him a martial man of merit." And in that other famous work of Fuller's, the *Worthies of England*, he refers again to Sir John Oldcastle "being made the make-sport in all plays for a coward." "It is easily known," adds the shrewd old writer, "out of what purse

this black penny came; the Papists railing on him for a heretick, and therefore he must also be a coward, though indeed he was a man of arms, every inch of him, and as valiant as any in his age."

"The make-sport *in all plays* for a coward," says Fuller. There must have been several plays then at least known to Fuller in which Oldcastle appeared as such a character. Some of these may have perished. We know that (say) between 1570 and 1620, that most prolific half-century of stage productions, numbers of plays were compiled and acted that were never printed, or if printed have not come down to us. And of these we are sure that many dealt with characters and incidents in the history of England. For the rise of the important line of chroniclers, Fabyan and Hall and Holinshed, had supplied the writer for the stage with an inexhaustible supply of themes, just at the time when the moral play, or mystery, was beginning to deal with real flesh-and-blood characters instead of moral abstractions. Oldcastle may have taken the place of the "vice" in many of these moralities, of which not even the bare names have survived, and been "made up" with a fat paunch and a red face, and subjected to abundant indignity and ill-treatment. But there has come down to us *one* play in which he occurs, by name, in his popular character as a disreputable old man; and of this play it will be interesting to take a very particular notice.

The play in question is the *Famous Victories*

of Henry V. Of the authorship of it we know nothing; and of its date we know only that it must have been produced *before* 1588, because Richard Tarleton, the famous low-comedy actor of that period, played in it, and he died in 1588.[1] The earliest edition of it known was printed in 1598—"The Famous Victories of Henry the fifth: containing the Honourable Battel of Agincourt: as it was plaid by the Queen's Majesties Players" (4° *Black Letter*). There is nothing in the style or language of the play to suggest who were the compilers. The dialogue is in mingled prose and a halting metre which it is hardly fair to call an attempt at blank verse. Certainly neither Marlowe, Greene, nor Peele had any hand in it. It is not divided into acts or scenes, and enjoyed evidently no kind of editing when it was sent to the press. But for all this, it is a very interesting production. It covers a considerable deal of ground, though it skims over it very rapidly. It opens with the incidents of the robbery on Gadshill by Prince Hal and his companions. Then we have the trial of one of the Prince's servants for theft, and the box on the ear given by the Prince to the Chief-Justice; the Prince's consequent imprisonment; the illness of the King, and the Prince's premature carrying off of the crown; the death of the King, and accession of the Prince, with the disgrace of his old com-

[1] [It is noticeable, however, that the low-comedy part in this play was not Oldcastle, but the carrier robbed on Gadshill.]

panions; the declaration of war against France, with the incident of the tennis balls; the victory of Agincourt, and the wooing and winning of the French princess. It is safe to say that there is not a poetical thought or expression from end to end of this drama, nor a stroke of humour other than sheer buffoonery. But in the brief summary I have given of its contents you will have recognised all the leading incidents in Shakspeare's two plays, the *First and Second Parts of Henry IV.*, and their sequel, *Henry V.* Here, in fact, is the raw material (and exceedingly crude it is) on which these three immortal dramas were composed, some fifteen or twenty years later. And in this rude drama Sir John Oldcastle is one of the characters. There is but little of him. Altogether, he does not speak in the course of the play more than thirty lines of dialogue. But the part he plays is unmistakable. He appears as the friend and associate of the young Prince in acts of common robbery on the highway. He takes part in the freebooting expeditions on Gadshill. He is represented as aiding and abetting the Prince in a life of lawlessness and dissipation. He looks forward to a still freer license when only his young friend shall succeed to the throne; but when that looked-for happy moment arrives, he is thrown over, and banished from the court. For the chief incidents of the play, the author unknown drew upon Holinshed and Sir John Elyot. For the introduction of Oldcastle he had

absolutely no historical authority. His Oldcastle is derived from the unwritten history of popular tradition. It is strange that there is no allusion to his fatness or his fondness for eating and drinking. He is in this play only a disreputable old[1] man, with a turn for using sacred names and allusions to point his conversation. And this undoubtedly points to the current popular conception of a *Lollard.* The Lollard, like his successor the Puritan of the two next centuries, was one who appealed habitually to Scripture, and the language of Scripture, as the sole rule and guide, and applied it to confute church doctrines and morals, where he found them corrupt. John Wiclif had given them the Bible in English; and this had put into their hands a weapon they were not slow to handle. The friars would dilate to their flocks upon this dragging of sacred names and allusions through the mire; this handling of Bible themes by an ignorant laity; and accordingly the popular caricature of the Lollard would inevitably come to be one who used Scripture names and phrases in season and out of season, and for the most grotesque and improper purposes. Traces of this conception of the typical Lollard, Oldcastle, are clearly discernible in the *Famous Victories of Henry V.*

About ten years after the production of this play it was apparently placed in the hands of William Shakspeare as material for a series of

[1] [There is no allusion to his age.]

dramas. The *First and Second Parts of Henry IV.* and their sequel, the drama of *Henry V.*, were written between 1597 and 1599. Shakspeare distributed over them the events which his predecessor had crowded into a single play. The Gadshill robbery is a leading incident of the comic scenes of the *First Part of Henry IV.* The stealing of the crown, and the subsequent repentance of the young Prince, followed by his father's death, and his repudiation of his former companions, come into the *Second Part*; and the expedition to France, the victory of Agincourt, and the wooing of the French princess, make up the chief interest of *Henry V.* Nothing else did Shakspeare borrow from the old play, except a few names. The Prince's madcap friend in the *Famous Victories*, habitually addressed as "Ned," is also the *Ned* of Shakspeare's play, though his full name and title is Edward Poins. Gadshill, the highwayman of the *Famous Victories* (probably so called from a favourite scene of his exploits), is adopted also by Shakspeare, and is the Gadshill of *Henry IV.* Why did not then Shakspeare (the question becomes inevitable), in taking over the other accomplice of the Prince from the older play, borrow his *name* also? Why did he not call the disreputable old man of his predecessor's drama Sir John Oldcastle?

The answer is, simply, that in the first instance he *did*; that when *Henry IV.*, Part 1, was first put on the stage the character which we know as Sir

John Falstaff was Sir John Oldcastle. Of this we have various and abundant proof. Nicholas Rowe (the earliest editor and biographer of Shakspeare), as early as 1709, mentions this as a tradition: "Upon this occasion it may not be improper to observe that this part of Falstaff is said to have been written originally under the name of Oldcastle; some of that family being then remaining, the Queen was pleased to command him to alter it; upon which he made use of Falstaff." Much nearer still to Shakspeare's own day a certain Dr. James, in a dedicatory letter prefixed to a work called the *Legend and Defence of the Noble Knight and Martyr, Sir John Oldcastel*, states it also, as a well-known fact, that "in Shakspeare's first shewe of *Henry V.* the person with which he undertook to play a buffoon, was not Falstaff, but Sir John Oldcastel." Fuller, in his *Church History*, says the same thing; but we are not left even to authorities so unimpeachable as these for our certainty on the point. Shakspeare's play itself contains traces of the original name. In the second scene of the first act of *Henry IV.*, Part 1, Falstaff asks Prince Hal: "Is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?" The Prince answers, "As the honey of Hybla, my *old* lad of the *castle*"; a retort which certainly involves a play upon the name *Old-Castle* of the person addressed. Again, in the play, Falstaff is described as having in his youth filled a place, that of "Page to Thomas Mowbray,

Duke of Norfolk," a position which we know from quite other sources that the historical Sir John Oldcastle filled. Moreover, in the quarto edition of the *Second Part of Henry IV.*, printed in 1600, though Falstaff is the name throughout of the fat humourist, the printer has in one place, by an obvious slip, left the prefix *Old* before one of Falstaff's speeches: showing that he was setting up the type from a printed copy or manuscript in which the character was named Oldcastle, and had omitted in this single instance to make the change of name. But, finally, and as if to set all doubt at rest, the *Second Part of Henry IV.* is furnished, as you may remember, with an epilogue; probably not by the poet himself, but supplied by the management of the theatre, the concluding words of which run as follows:—

> One word more, I beseech you. If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katharine of France: where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a' be killed with your hard opinions; for *Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man.*

"Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man." How simply and satisfactorily does not this bring all we have been saying to a point. It can mean nothing unless this—that the Sir John of the play had been first *Oldcastle*, and had then, for reasons significantly hinted, been promptly changed. Fuller, and James, and others,

have told us that the living descendants of the once wealthy and famous Lord Cobham had taken umbrage at this caricature of their great ancestor, and that the Royal authority had been called in to bring about a remedy. But the words of the epilogue hint another reason. The materials for something like a trustworthy history of England's past were beginning to accumulate. The chroniclers were doing something; the enterprise of other searchers of old documents was doing more; and already for forty years there had been in print Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of the Church* —in which something like a true picture of the historic Oldcastle was set forth. And in that age of the Reformation every name of those who had striven and suffered in that earlier protest against ecclesiastical corruption was becoming more and more dear to the English people—*Oldcastle died a martyr.* It was to Foxe that the English people were mainly indebted for having first taught them this truth; and the day when he could be safely set forth as a buffoon and a sensualist was passed for ever.

How and why Shakspeare then changed Sir John Oldcastle into Sir John Falstaff does not so much concern my immediate purpose, and may be briefly dismissed. Casting about for a Sir John, approximately near in time to the historic date of his play, to take the place of Oldcastle, Shakspeare recalled a Sir John Fastolf (probably already, in the very unfixed spelling of

that age, known indiscriminately as Fastolf and Falstaff) who played a not unimportant part in the reigns of Henry IV., V., and VI. He had already appeared as a character in the *First Part of Henry VI.* (a play which the best critics are almost unanimous in holding that Shakspeare had but little hand in), but his name would be well known to Shakspeare from its use upon the stage. The historic Fastolf was a soldier of unquestioned gallantry; but he, it appears, had on one occasion been accused of cowardice; and he is known to have been a follower of Wiclif—a Lollard. These facts were known possibly by popular tradition; and it would seem as if, one Sir John having failed him, another would do equally well to fill his place. And so it came about that "Oldcastle" gave place to "Falstaff"; and one historical caricature was succeeded by another, as far as we know, equally remote from truth. And of this we may be quite certain—that it never entered into Shakspeare's mind for one moment that he was committing an historical outrage. Certain materials came into his hands, to be made up into new forms. How the character was labelled when complete I do not suppose troubled him much. At the same time remember that Shakspeare must have been perfectly well aware of the popular idea of Oldcastle. His instinct was bent on producing *a* character true to *a* type in his own mind. Whether that character was after-

wards christened Oldcastle or Falstaff did not concern him.

Now let us examine how out of the popular tradition of the character of Oldcastle, and especially out of the outline of that character suggested by the author of the *Famous Victories*, Shakspeare evolved his greatest humorous creation; perhaps the greatest humorous effort in any literature, ancient or modern. The transformation he effected is one as marvellous as the change which the good fairy effects in the nursery legend of Cinderella. *There*, you remember, out of a pumpkin and some rats and mice, the wave of the enchanter's wand produces a gold coach, drawn by gallant and richly caparisoned steeds, driven and attended by splendid coachmen and lackeys. *Here*—out of a broken-down Lollard, a fat old sensualist, retaining just sufficient recollection of the studies of his more serious days to be able to point his jokes with them—the wand of a greater enchanter brings before us this complex and absolutely consistent creation of the fat knight, fertile and absolutely unscrupulous in resource; brilliant in wit; making capital out of all his failings; turning, as he says, "even diseases to commodity"—the most brilliant figure even in Shakspeare's own gallery of humorous portraits. And yet all through it we shall trace the quarry out of which it was hewn, the grain of the original stone which Shakspeare's chisel shaped into its perfect form.

I wonder if it has ever struck you how, running through the whole creation, is this thread of the perverted Puritan—of the man whose memory, and perhaps uneasy conscience, is always recalling to him the religious phraseology and topics of his youth. Take the very first scene in which he appears: all through Falstaff's conception of his own character is found the assumption that he was once a profoundly respectable and religious character, who has been spoiled by bad company.

Hal, I prithee, trouble me no more with vanity. I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought. . . . Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal; God forgive thee for't! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I *will* give it over: by the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain: I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

Prince. Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack?

Fal. 'Zounds, where thou wilt, lad; *I'll* make *one*; an I do not, call me villain and baffle me.

Prince. I see a good amendment of life in thee; from praying to purse-taking.

Fal. Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation; 'tis no *sin* for a man to *labour in his vocation.*

What put it into Shakspeare's head to put this distinctively religious, not to say Scriptural phraseology into the mouth of Falstaff, but that the rough draft of the creation, as it came into his hands, was the decayed Puritan? For the Lollard of the fourteenth century was in this respect the Puritan of the sixteenth, that the one

certain mark of his calling was this use of the language of Scripture, and that conventicle style which had been developed out of it. So again, a little later, we have Falstaff saying, with the precise manner of one of the Covenanting preachers in *Old Mortality*, "Well, God give *thee* the spirit of persuasion and *him* the ears of profiting, that what thou speakest may move, and what he hears may be believed." All through the language of Falstaff will you trace these fragments of Scripture or at least of religious phraseology: "*Sons of darkness*"; "Ancient writers do report that *pitch doth defile*"; "If a tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree"; and running along with it constant melancholy references to the time when he was a religious man. "Company, villanous company, has been the spoil of me." "An I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is like, I'm a peppercorn, a brewer's horse: the inside of a church!" And besides such interlarding of his discourse with allusions to *Pharaoh's lean kine*, and *Adam in the days of innocency*, and the like, it will strike you afresh, if you re-examine the character with this (what I will call) *Oldcastle key* to it, how two images from the Gospel histories seem to haunt him along his whole course—those of the *Prodigal Son* and *Dives and Lazarus*. Yet these are not dragged in by the head and shoulders. There is no dramatic impropriety in their appearance. Shakspeare was too sound an artist for that.

There were no figures from sacred history more familiar to people in Shakspeare's age than these. On church walls, on inlaid cabinets, in books of emblems, and, above all, on the tapestry or painted cloth with which rooms of houses were hung, there were no more popular subjects than these. Indeed, in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Falstaff is again one of the characters, he is represented as lodging in a chamber at the Garter Inn, where one of these themes was perpetually before his eyes:—"Marry, sir," says Simple to mine host, "I come to speak with Sir John Falstaff from Master Slender." "Well," replies mine host, "there's his chamber, his house, his castle—'tis painted about with the story of the Prodigal, fresh and new." (This was what was called "painted cloth" rather than tapestry.) Going back to *Henry IV.*, Falstaff retorts upon Mrs. Quickly, when she is afraid she'll have to pawn her plate and her tapestry to raise the ten pounds the unconscionable man requires: "Glasses, glasses, is the only drinking: and for the walls, a pretty slight drollery, or the *story of the Prodigal* . . . is worth a thousand of these hangings and these fly-bitten tapestries." The topic of the Prodigal has a strange fascination for him. When he had so misused the king's commission to raise recruits, by allowing all the suitable men to buy themselves out, and then enlisting instead such a ragged regiment of tatterdemalions, he admits that "you would think I had a hundred

and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks." The companion illustration from the parables appears in the same speech, where he describes the slaves he has recruited "as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth, where the glutton's dogs licked his sores." You may trace for yourselves the other abundant references in Falstaff's repertory of illustration to the "glutton"—the Dives (that is) of the parable. The glutton and the prodigal, these two figures are always at his command to colour a story, to point an allusion, to heighten a contrast. Himself a very vulgar glutton, faring sumptuously every day on fat capon and gallons of sack, qualified by a mere ha'porth of bread—a very vulgar prodigal, discovering that there is "no remedy for this consumption of the purse, for borrowing only lingers and lingers it out"; he finds perhaps a mysterious fascination in handling the awful narrations in which the fate of the typical glutton and the recovery of the typical prodigal are imaged forth. To my mind, there is nothing in the world of imaginative creation more wonderful than the way in which Shakspeare has taken up the quite impossible and inconsistent popular tradition of the Lollard Oldcastle and has transmuted it into this absolutely consistent figure of the degraded—may we not say, the decomposed—gentleman and Christian. It is a living embodiment of the awful truth—*Optimi corruptio pessima.* And with exquisite art, Shakspeare

represents him at one time assuming to be the praiseworthy result of his own religious bringing-up, and at another moment as ready to turn the very same associations into ridicule. "My Lord," he says to the Lord Chief-Justice, with a quite magnificent burst of invention, "My Lord, I was born (about three o'clock in the afternoon) with a white head and something of a round belly. For my voice—I have lost it with hallelujahing and singing of anthems." How superb the audacity of this invention! The Lollard and the Puritan were alike famous for their habit of chanting or singing. The Puritan who "sang Psalms to hornpipes" we know from the description of the shepherd in the *Winter's Tale*. Philologists are not quite agreed, I believe, as to the root of the word *Lollard*, but one of the most commonly accepted is from the low-German "Lollen," to sing; just as the Puritan form of religion in much later times has impressed upon the vulgar mind as its most prominent association that of *psalm-singing*. But though at one moment Falstaff makes this sublimely impudent vaunt, at another he expresses for us, in another outburst equally witty in the surprisingness of its invention, his disgust with men and things, by declaring, "I would I were a *weaver*!" (Weavers, you know, have always been noted for musical tastes, singing at their looms.) "I would I were a weaver! I could sing psalms or *anything*." As if this was the last drop in the cup of degradation

V Sir John Falstaff.

that humanity could be asked to swallow! Yes, and there is one more curious instance of the perverted Puritan, turning and trampling in his contempt on the very signs and symptoms that had marked his own better days. When Master Dombledon refuses to supply Falstaff with "two-and-twenty yards of satin" on credit (Bardolph's name being offered as "security"), Sir John apostrophises him, after a frightful imprecation, as a "rascally yea-forsooth knave." Now, a "yea-forsooth knave" is nothing more or less than the man of the world's epithet for one who will not defile his lips with the good "mouth-filling oaths" and other profanities of the world, but confines his affirmations to *yea, yea* and *nay, nay*. It was the stock jest against the Lollard of the fifteenth century, as against the Puritan of Shakspeare's own day, that he would not swear like other people. It is a trivial instance, but it goes to make up this consummate picture of the demoralised gentleman, on whom the temptations of sensuality and an unlimited intellectual fertility have done their worst.

Intellectual fertility, infinite invention, boundless resource—of these we think first when the individuality of the fat knight once more comes before us. *Wit*, let us call it, to reduce it to its simplest form. Falstaff is the wittiest of Shakspeare's witty characters, and is no exception to the rule that Shakspeare almost invariably associates wit with some moral deficiency. We have his *Mercutio*—wit with frivolity—the mere idler

and lounger of life; *Jaques*, wit with a selfish cynicism; *Richard III.*, wit with heartlessness; *Iago*, wit with the nature of a fiend. Great moralists have told us the same thing since in words, what Shakspeare's knowledge of the heart made him exhibit in action. "Diseur de bons mots," says Pascal, "mauvais caractère." "I am convinced," said Sydney Smith of wit (and we feel that it may have cost the witty prebendary something to make the confession) "that its certain tendency is to deprave the understanding and to corrupt the heart." And indeed wit (and I beg of you not to confuse it for one moment in your minds with the divine gift of humour, that takes account of and feels with equal poignancy the sad and the joyful, the temporary and the essential sides of men and things)—wit is only free to work its greatest triumphs when it has got rid of truth and charity. Falstaff's wit is magnificent, but it is absolutely unscrupulous. When he gets the best in argument, it is always by an intellectual *coup de maître*, never by a moral. Exaggeration (which means, in effect, "never mind *truth*—go in for *point*") has never been raised to such an art. "I am out of pocket by you," poor Mrs. Quickly complains of him with bitter tears. "You owe me money, Sir John, for your diet and by-drinkings . . . and now you pick a quarrel to beguile me of it: I bought you a dozen of shirts to your back." To which Falstaff retorts: "Dowlas, filthy dowlas"—dowlas is one

of the coarsest kinds of linen, you will understand —"I have given them away to bakers' wives, and they have made bolters of them." A bolter was a sieve; and accordingly, if we are to believe this audacious assertion, the material for his shirts was a kind of canvas that flour could be sifted through! It is indeed *splendide mendax!* a miracle of exaggeration. It is like Douglas Jerrold's description of the gritty salad (supplied to him at a tavern where they were dining) as "a gravel walk with a weed here and there." Or, again, take the instance of his promptness in defending his choice of the extremely diminutive *Simon Shadow*, and the pusillanimous *Francis Feeble*, when he is raising recruits for the king: "Shadow is the very man," he says, "and why? because if it comes to fighting he'll be so difficult to hit. He presents no mark to the enemy: the foeman may with as great aim level at the edge of a penknife." Ingenuity might seem to have reached its climax in this apology, but something yet finer remains in what follows: "And for a retreat! how swiftly will this Feeble the woman's tailor run off!" He will be so useful in a *retreat.* What magnificent resource in the mind who thought of this! How magnificent—and how unscrupulous!

I have had occasion already to quote particular sentences from the scene with the Chief-Justice; but it needs to be taken as a whole in order to estimate the fertility of resource—the audacity

of invention—which is the special note of Falstaff's wit. All through this interview he is able to maintain the appearance of being the *most* patriotic, the *most* virtuous, the *bravest* of His Majesty's subjects. How immense is his quiet assumption that his military experience is such that the War Office (so to speak) cannot do without him! "There is not a dangerous action can peep out his head, but *I* am thrust upon it. Well, I cannot last for ever. But it was always yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common. If ye will needs say I am an old man, you should give me rest." How adroit is this—the thought of accepting, as it were humbly, the Judge's remonstrance that he ought to know better at his time of life, and making a modest plea of it that, if he *is* old, then his country might spare him further service. "I would to heaven my name were not so terrible to the enemy as it is!" And there is this difference between Falstaff and the military braggadocio, the "miles gloriosus" of Plautus, which was to become with Shakspeare's dramatic contemporaries a stock figure on the stage. Ancient Pistol, who appears with Falstaff in these plays, is the representative of this type, as Parolles is in *All's Well that Ends Well.* Falstaff is not a coward, a fire-eater, who is trying to sustain a character as a very brave and terrible person. His assumption of bravery and

patriotism and all other such qualities is simply an intellectual amusement. He is an artist in making the improbable appear probable by his skill in argument, and, like a true artist, he delights in his work. You can see from this scene that he does not believe in himself in the least, nor much expects that any one else will; but the opportunity of being matched in argument with one so worthy of his steel as the Lord Chief-Justice of England is so delightful to him that it calls forth all his powers. It may be said (but it would be inconsiderately said) that he argues in the spirit of a humourist. But Falstaff is not a great humourist—he is essentially a wit. To be a humourist a man must have expansive sympathies and a heart to grasp human nature as a whole. Falstaff has not these. He is essentially an egoist. "Humour," said Thackeray, "what is it but a union of love and wit?" In Falstaff, alas! is all the wit; but truth and charity had been killed within him, while the wit was growing to its matchless maturity.

In the epilogue to the *Second Part of Henry IV.*, as we have seen, a hint is given of the possible reappearance of the character of Falstaff in a subsequent play. The sequel was written—the noble drama of *Henry V.*—but the alternative, also hinted as possible, that the knight might have already passed away from this earthly stage altogether, is found to have actually occurred. Prince Henry has succeeded to the throne; has

banished the companions of his idle and profligate days; and Falstaff's chances of keeping up appearances before the world are gone for ever. Even his resources are exhausted now. Chagrin, and the prospect of a miserable pension to be enjoyed ten miles away from the seat of his old pleasures and triumphs, is more than he can bear. Poor old Mrs. Quickly, with her easy conscience, but not unwomanly heart, who has so often ministered to his vices, and lent him money for his wardrobe and his "by-drinkings," sounds the first note of the coming end. "The king has killed his heart," says this illiterate old soul. "Ah, poor heart! he is so shaked of a burning quotidian tertian, that it is most lamentable to behold." And then we hear, in a few hours more, that all is over. The scene in which we are told of this is transcendent even among the master-strokes of the great dramatist. The wretched crew who have been Falstaff's creatures and hangers-on—Pistol, the bully; Nym, the rogue with the fancy vocabulary; Bardolph, the phlegmatic and somewhat beery moralist, are shown us as yet feeling some touch of nature, some compunctious visitings about the master they have lost. Pistol cannot forget his theatricals, even in this valley of the shadow:—

> My manly heart doth yearn.
> Bardolph, be blithe: Nym, rouse thy vaunting veins:
> Boy, bristle thy courage up; for Falstaff he is dead,
> And we must yearn therefore.

"Shall we shog?" asks Nym, using the pot-house euphuism of his class, and they go their way, and their old witty companion passes into oblivion. Surely, in all fiction, there is no more wonderful, no more terrible death-scene than this! Dickens has shown us old Scrooge lying dead, unpitied and unmourned, while the charwoman and the undertaker's men pilfer his few trinkets, and strip the curtains from his bed. Balzac has drawn for us, with his merciless hand, a Père Gaveot, forsaken of his wretched children, dead in the attic of the Pension Vaugier, while the frivolous fellow-lodgers make puns about the event at their common meal; but Shakspeare has surpassed all humourists here, by the touch of religious irony that elevates the scene. The last flicker of the long-extinguished conscience—the last leaping up of the candle in the socket. "A' cried out 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him a' should not think of God." We know what this poor woman—most singular of ghostly counsellors—meant. Indeed she goes on to tell us: "I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet." But with instinctive art, Shakspeare lets us hear her words of comfort before she adds her explanation; and the words remain as the grimmest and most awful commentary on the gospel of materialism that the human imagination has given us. "I, to comfort him, bid him a' should not think of God." A

witty friend of mine once suggested that it would make a perfect motto for Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*. It may be that to say this is to err a little in Falstaff's own direction. An epigram is scarcely ever a truth. But at the same time there will be few who do not see to what the application points.

Such, then, is the use which Shakspeare made of the few scattered fragments of a perverted reputation that came into his hands. The subject of Falstaff is an old and hackneyed one. Thinkers have loved for a hundred years to analyse his character and intellect, as they have those of Hamlet and Iago and Jaques, and will do so to the end of time. I might almost apologise for adding yet another pebble to the heap. But I have chosen rather to dwell upon the moral interest of the character—for that was the only germ upon which the humourist had to work. A "corrupted Lollard"—this was the hint—and on this hint he spake. The marvellous transformation he effected I have dwelt upon. In its sheer brilliance it is like the hand of Science taking the refuse of coal-tar and sending it forth again in the splendour of aniline dyes. "An old cloak," says Falstaff, when Bardolph takes service with the innkeeper, "an old cloak makes a new jerkin; a withered serving-man a fresh tapster." And thus the worn-out caricature of an Oldcastle, just as it was on the point of coming to an end (for historic accuracy in such matters was only just

beginning in Shakspeare's time to be reckoned a virtue), makes a new Sir John Falstaff.

I have shown how the publication of Foxe's *Martyrs* aimed the first and most fatal blow at the popular superstition about the martyr Oldcastle. It is noteworthy, in conclusion, how in our own time our own great poet, Tennyson, has done his part towards reviving the name of Oldcastle, and showing the noble and pathetic side of it by a touching poem in blank verse, in which the valiant Lollard, after his escape from the Tower, is represented as wandering among the hills and valleys of Wales, aware that a price is set on his head, and that the end may be nearer than he knows, and comforting himself with the thought of his revered teacher, Wiclif, the soul that has made his soul wiser. Lord Tennyson shows Oldcastle as mourning over his old friend Harry of Monmouth, once the companion of his thoughtless days, who had once laughed with him against the hypocrisies and follies of monks and pardon-sellers, and yet who has now taken up the line of persecutor—

> Him, who should bear the sword
> Of Justice—what! the kingly, kindly boy;
> Who took the world so easily heretofore,
> My boon-companion, tavern-fellow—him
> Who gibed and japed—in many a merry tale
> That shook our sides—at Pardoners, Summoners,
> Friars, absolution-sellers, monkeries
> And nunneries, when the wild hour and the wine
> Had set the wits aflame.

Harry of Monmouth,
Or Amurath of the East?
Better to sink
Thy fleurs-de-lys in slime again, and fling
Thy royalty back into the riotous fits
Of wine and harlotry—thy shame, and mine,
Thy comrade—than to persecute the Lord,
And play the Saul that never will be Paul.

Within a few months of this, on Christmas Day 1417, the real Oldcastle was executed for treason and for heresy. We know him at last in his old true name, as the "Good Lord Cobham"—

God's great gift of speech abused
Made his memory confused.
Let them rave!

Shakspeare has done him no wrong—he has built up indeed a character on the false conception of a noble Englishman—but he has committed no treason against the eternal truths of the human conscience. "Oldcastle died a martyr, and this (Falstaff) is not the man." This was true, and needed saying in vindication of the great Lollard, but "fat" Jack witnessed also in his death to certain truths as to "conduct being four-fifths of life," of which the world will never cease to need Shakspeare's imperishable reminder.

EUPHUISM—PAST AND PRESENT

THE last quarter of a century has witnessed an extraordinary revival of interest in the writers of the Elizabethan Age. Every author known, and some hitherto unknown, have been reissued, re-edited, and recriticised, almost *ad nauseam*. And there should accordingly be little left me to say that is new about a writer who was very famous in his own day, and left a name in more senses than one, for he added a most expressive word, found useful up to the present moment, to our literary vocabulary. But, notwithstanding, I so often hear persons in conversation mixing up euphuism with euphemism, and otherwise showing a certain confusion of mind as to what John Lyly really contributed, in the way of benefit or injury, to the literary progress of his time, that I will ask the kind indulgence of the many experts present, if I tell over again an often-told story (I will do it briefly), and just explain what is Lyly's precise significance in English literature, in connection with that book of his that gave us the word "euphuism." For he was something

besides the author of this book, as you all know. Lyly was a poet and wit and scholar—a writer of plays—one of that remarkable group who moulded the drama into the shape in which it came into the hands of Shakspeare. He first wrote comedy in prose, and thereby prepared the way for many better things that followed: for the wit-combats of Benedick and Beatrice, and the sweet prattle of Hermione and Mamillius; and for that we bless his name, and can forgive him much. But though the good he did was *not* "interred with his bones," yet it is sadly true that the evil he did, or helped to do, "lived after him," and has not lost all its poison yet. John Lyly was a Kentish gentleman, born just about the middle of the sixteenth century, and educated at Magdalen College, Oxford. In 1579, when he was about six-and-twenty, he published his famous Romance in Prose, which, for short, we call *Euphues* (from the name of its hero), but of which the full title was as follows:—

"Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit. Very pleasant for all gentlemen to read, and most necessary to remember. Wherein are contained the delights that Wit followeth in his youth, by the pleasantness of love; and the happiness he reapeth in age, by the perfectness of Wisdom. By John Lylly, Master of Art."

We call the work a romance, in default of a better word, but it has little of the quality we associate with modern romances, or even with

those of his contemporaries. It was not a romance of passion or adventure, like Sidney's *Arcadia*, or Lodge's *Rosalynde*. The story in it is indeed reduced to a vanishing point; and though a few gentlemen and ladies form the *dramatis personæ*, the action is devised singly and solely as the means of bringing in long conversations on the subject of love and friendship, and religion and education, and the moralities generally. These form the staple of the book, and for the sake of these Lyly wrote it. The book was specially commended to the attention of ladies. It was for the drawing-room, so Lyly expressly said. His aim was to bring morality and true philosophy into favour and into fashion. Like Steele and Addison, a hundred and fifty years later, Lyly wished to bring philosophy down from the "sphery climes" and domesticate it in the lady's boudoir. This dominant feature of the book is naturally unknown to the modern reader, for the simple fact that its peculiar style forms an absolute barrier to its being read, and that it is the style which has determined the book's reputation. Indeed, since Lyly's own day, I suppose no one had troubled to point out the real secret of the book's original popularity, until the late Charles Kingsley wrote some perfectly true words about it in *Westward Ho!* To persons who would sneer at Lyly's *Euphues*, he retorted: "Have they read it? For if they have done so, I pity

them if they have not found it, in spite of occasional tediousness and pedantry, as brave, righteous, and pious a book as man need look into." For the subject-matter of the book this praise is not too high. Its tone is unexceptionable, and its moral elevation throughout quite remarkable. *Euphues* belongs to a class of writing that has always been popular, and always will be. The moral essay, slightly concealed in the disguise of a novel, or a drama, or a dialogue among friends, just sufficiently adorned to distinguish it from a homily or a sermon proper, with a slight admixture of humour and sentiment, and perhaps a gently indicated background of some love-making, will always appeal to an immense public. And we may well be thankful that this is so, and that so much real goodness, tenderness, resignation, and religious feeling are sown in this way broadcast over society. Every generation produces its own crop of these works. Sometimes the genius of their writers constitutes them literature, as with the essays of Addison and Johnson. More often they serve their purpose with a certain class of readers, and then die away, like the "Proverbial Philosophy" of the late Mr. Tupper, and the "Gentle Life" of the late Mr. Hain Friswell.

Well, it is to this class of literature that Lyly's *Euphues* belongs. It is difficult to fix its exact place and degree of merit in the catalogue. No doubt there is not much that is novel

or original in its moral teaching; and even were it written in the most simple style imaginable, it might present few attractions to us. It may be full of truisms and platitudes, but we are to remember that truisms nowadays were not so much truisms three hundred years ago, and that there was a charm and a novelty in ethical discussions to the ladies of Elizabethan households, where there is none such for us. And we need take no shame that, even were Lyly's romance for other reasons readable, the discourses of "Euphues, a young gentleman of Athens," and "Philautus, a young gentleman of Athens," and "Eubulus, an old gentleman of Naples," offer but little attraction to us of the nineteenth century.

But they offered great attraction to the courtiers of the sixteenth century and their wives, and the work achieved a rapid and amazing popularity. We know of some six editions that it went through in the first twenty years of its existence, and that meant a great deal in those days. Moreover, Lyly met with the invariable experience of the writer of a successful book. The booksellers were at him to write another, and a sequel to *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, appeared only a year later, called *Euphues and his England.* This proved almost equally successful, and both books remained in demand into nearly the middle of the seventeenth century. Of the extraordinary popularity of these romances

there is no doubt whatever. We have the fact of the number of editions sold; we have the direct evidence of all of Lyly's contemporaries; we have the indirect evidence of the universality of that "truest flattery" which takes the shape of imitation. Euphues was introduced by name into the title of other romances by rival wits and poets, who knew it was *the* name to conjure with. And what was the real cause of this unexampled success? Because the substance of Lyly's long-drawn-out ethical dialogues is not, to us, very edifying or interesting, it has been the custom of critic after critic to assert that the one attraction of the books lay in their *style*; that they were bought and read, and quoted, because of the eccentric phraseology and the curiously constructed sentences in which they were composed. Well, I believe, and hope to show, that this is a case of mistaking cause for effect. I believe that mere style, whether good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, has never yet made a book popular; but that it is always the book that brings its style into popularity, and consequently into imitation. But waiving this question for the moment, let us consider what was this famous style of Lyly's books which ultimately gave us the word "Euphuism," where he found it, and what he added to it. The story of its origin is a long one, but for our purpose may be briefly set forth.

One of the effects of the revival of learning

during the century between 1450 and 1550—the reopening to the eager intellects of Europe of the masterpieces of ancient literature, poetical, dramatic, philosophical—had been to induce a kind of intellectual light-headedness. Men had suddenly come into a vast, an unprecedented fortune, and for a long while did not know how to use it. Their heads were turned; and if it could not be said exactly that they were not answerable for their actions, it certainly was the case that they were not answerable for their speech. They found themselves with such a marvellous new balance at their intellectual bankers that, like a young heir to a millionaire, they were disposed to toss the coin about in sheer bravado. Having gained this precious possession, denied to the vulgar and ignorant, they must make it felt, and not hide it under a bushel. If their knowledge exceeded that of the rude clown, their language should be in a concatenation accordingly. And, born of this ambition, certain affectations (as we call them) of style sprang up in cultured circles all over Europe. They spread like an epidemic, and with just those variations of symptom and type that other epidemics have shown, due to difference of climate and the constitution of the sufferer. There was one form of it in Spain, another form in Italy, another in France, and, by and by, several distinct forms in England. And though the disease itself was in the air, the particular

form of it was, in every case that we can trace, due to the stimulus of some poet or other imaginative writer who, falling under its influence, left upon it the mark of his own individuality. Among these were Guevara and Gongora in Spain, Marini in Italy, and, as we shall see, Lyly in England. Differing greatly in details from one another, the main characteristics of the disease, regarded as a whole, were a desire to write in a manner different from that of ordinary men; to let the superior knowledge and education of the writer tell upon his style, so as to make it obvious on the surface that a learned man held the pen. In certain forms of the malady a desire was shown to display a large amount of out-of-the-way information, to pile up allusions to ancient authors or ancient mythology or natural history (of the fabulous sort); but the most marked general characteristic common to all of them was the making the structure of the sentence as different as possible from that of everyday life; to avoid the natural at all costs and substitute the artificial; to exhibit skill and ingenuity in the arrangement of clauses; to get odd effects out of antithesis and alliteration, or the "hunting of the letter"—to build, in short, pretty edifices out of words as children do with a box of bricks. It was the very skittishness of pedantry. I have called it "affectation," but that is hardly the word for it. It was rather, I think, something of a temporary intoxication—the result of unbounded new

resources and an untempered zeal to display them ; a wish to be clever, not so much from personal vanity as from a sense that, in intellectual matters, *noblesse oblige*, and that being so cultivated they were bound to show it.

Well, the epidemic reached England, and the particular form of it from foreign parts that started it here came from the writings of a certain Spanish prelate of the court of Charles V., of the name of Antonio de Guevara. He wrote more than one book, but the most famous was a collection of letters attributed to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, but, of course, spurious. This work, entitled *Marco Aurelio, or the Golden Book*, enjoyed a golden popularity, and was translated into all the principal European languages, and accordingly into English, by Lord Berners, as early as 1532. A second work of Guevara's, also consisting of letters and essays on ethical topics, *The Familiar Epistles*, appeared in an English dress in 1575. Some fifty years ago the excellent Mr. Hallam pointed out that the type of literary artifice which Lyly was to make so familiar was borrowed from Guevara, and, within the last few years, a scholarly German, Dr. Landmann, has drawn out the likenesses between the two with great thoroughness. Into these details we do not follow him. Suffice it to say that the proofs of Lyly's indebtedness to Guevara extend much further than to style. The subjects treated and the ways of treating them are continually

alike, and we cannot doubt that Lyly judged, and with good reason, that a book of native manufacture, discussing love and morals and philosophy, and written in a style that was already more or less a fashion, from its novelty and piquancy, would find many readers. We have seen how his anticipations were confirmed. *Euphues* became the book of the season, and of several seasons. And being thus written on the lines of a foreign fashion, modified and developed by Lyly's own fancy and ingenuity, it fell in with a tendency of the time, already sufficiently pronounced. As it was in every one's hands, every one could enjoy imitating it and borrowing from it, and so the style began to permeate other books, and to spread even into men's daily speech. This, you know, has since become a familiar experience. A literary jargon (if it is not disrespectful to call it so) passes very quickly into a colloquial jargon. How soon the particular jargon of Lyly was called "Euphuism" I think there is nothing to show. As far as I know, the first use of the word is found in the often-quoted passage in Blount's edition of Lyly's *Comedies* in 1632, where he tells us that our nation was in Lyly's debt "for a new English which he taught them. *Euphues and his England* began first that language; all our ladies were then his scholars; and that beauty in court which could not parley 'Euphuism' was as little regarded as she which now there speaks not French." Blount may have coined the happy

phrase then and there, but just as probably he used a term already in vogue.[1] Such terms almost coin themselves.

Perhaps some among my audience who never opened Lyly's pages might like to have a sample of a style which played so important a part in infecting a whole literature. But it cannot well be "sampled." Its peculiar effect can only be tested in a long draught, and a long draught is absolutely nauseous. Just now we heard Mr. Kingsley kindly describing Lyly as guilty of "occasional tediousness and pedantry," but (to confess the truth) there is nothing "occasional" about Lyly. The style that was to become so famous never deviates into naturalness or simplicity. The perpetual building of sentences in antithetical clauses, with other verbal artifice; the constant display of classical lore and the facts of a (mostly fabulous) natural history never varies and never ceases. No one nowadays could read aloud two consecutive pages and retain his self-respect; no one, save by setting his face as a flint, in the severe spirit of a student, could endure more than half-a-dozen in the seclusion of his own library. And it requires this same severe spirit to understand how, even in the peculiar circumstances of Elizabethan society, such writing should ever have been popular. I have maintained already—and I think the history of literary influ-

[1] [Murray's *Dictionary* quotes "Euphuisme" from Gabriel Harvey 1592; and "euphuize" from Dekker 1609 and Middleton 1627.]

ence in all times since supports the view—that it was the book that commended the style, not the style the book; the familiar presentment of good religion, good feeling, and good sense, on all sorts of subjects, that made the book popular, and that this popularity connected itself, by a most natural and familiar law of association, with the style in which it was written. And then, you understand, Lyly did not invent this style, though he left his own impress on it. He found forms of it already in existence; he recognised that in that time of intellectual ferment the educated and literary world, and the hangers-on of the educated and literary world (always a much larger body), were all agog for habits of speech that might bear witness to their culture. It was he who, in the first instance, borrowed a fashion; and by combining it with a far more worthy fashion of the day, a genuine interest in moral and intellectual problems, he made an undoubtedly lucky hit; and we may be sure that no one was more astonished than Lyly himself at the success of his experiment.

And so it came about that the epidemic being already in the world—for there were Euphuists before *Euphues*—Lyly was fated to become a new centre of infection, and (almost accidentally) to affix his own name to a bad fashion, for which he was only partly responsible. How this fashion, stimulated by him, worked and spread is a commonplace of Elizabethan history. A school

of direct imitators arose among the lesser wits and poets of the day, borrowing, in many cases, the very name of his hero, and copying his every trick and phrase. Nor were the greater wits wholly unaffected by it—not even the greatest of them all. Philip Sidney composed his *Arcadia* in a euphuism of his own—owing less to the precise model of Lyly than to that of the Italian and Spanish pastoral romancists. But Shakspeare is the most interesting and significant testimony to Lyly's influence. Living in the very heart and focus of London literary life, and associating with young gentlemen in the highest intellectual spirits, he heard "euphuism parleyed" all day long. When he began comedy writing, with Lyly's precedent as a comedy writer strongly present to him, he laughed at euphuism; but he showed, notwithstanding, how difficult it was for himself to escape the infection. Where the wit and fancy of his earliest comedies are least to our present taste, it is where the surface-fancy and phrase-trickery of the euphuists controlled him most. He escaped altogether from it in his later comedies; wherever he was most earnest, he became most *himself*, and when Beatrice urges Benedick to avenge Hero, all traces of Lyly in the dialogue have disappeared. But he continued to laugh at all phases of the euphuism epidemic to the end of his days. Pistol talks the euphuism of the pot-house, Osric of the court, Polonius of the schools, and for each in turn Shakspeare

takes care to show his contempt and aversion. "Pistol!" ejaculates Falstaff. "He hears with ears," replies his ancient, striking an attitude—and even poor Sir Hugh Evans is offended with the absurdity. "He hears with ears! Why, this is affectations!" And after Polonius has been spinning and twisting his "True, 'tis pity—pity 'tis, 'tis true," and all the rest of it, the queen interposes, not too soon, with an appeal for "more matter—and less art."

In these two remonstrances, "Fie! 'tis affectations," and the cry for "more matter, and less art," is really summed up the moral of Lyly's euphuism, and all euphuism in times since. It is the putting *manner* above *matter*, or giving it as a substitute for matter, that is at the root of what may fairly be called euphuism. And yet, though Sir Hugh Evans calls this "affectations," and though we should most of us accept that name for it as just, the very essence and mischief of euphuism lies not so much in its affectation as in its being *imitation*. For it is not until the copyists, the plagiarists and parasites of style, enter upon the scene that the real evil begins. In one sense, the mischief begins with the man who, quite innocently perhaps, first uses the style, and thus sets the example. But it is the men who borrow the style of some writer of pronounced individuality, and who cannot borrow any better quality from him, it is these persons who start the real mischief—writers who can

perpetuate the "art" (such as it is) without being able to contribute any fresh "matter," who (if I may use an exceedingly homely metaphor) are perpetually adding more water to the teapot, but never any more tea.

And such is the history of euphuism onwards from the time of Lyly. It spread like a disease; it became the popular style of a dozen other romances; it became the jargon of the court and wherever young scholars and wits most did congregate. Its ridiculous side was abundantly recognised. It was laughed at, but it lived. It never affected verse in quite the same way as prose. Verse was to develop a euphuism of its own, but of another breed. It owned a different origin. Its pedantry was pedantry of idea rather than of phraseology. Even where a poem was full of conceits—the offspring of hard-driven invention, and fancy run wild—the diction was often pure and lucid enough. To trace the actual course of the euphuistic epidemic onward is too large a theme for us. The euphuism of the Stuart period exhibited many variations on that of the Tudor. This later euphuism was pedantic and artificial; but it was in ingenuity of thought, in "out-of-the-wayness" of metaphor and simile that it mainly showed itself, rather than in tricks of phrase. Johnson called it the "metaphysical" style—that style of Cowley and his companions—and the epithet has been demurred to, but he was clearly pointing to

this peculiar subtlety of fancy as distinguished from mere over-exquisitiveness of language. Such was the style of Cowley, and Lovelace, and Cleveland, and even of sacred writers such as Herbert and Vaughan, and even of Dryden himself, when that great poet condescended to the depraved literary tastes of his age, as he occasionally did in this as well as in more deplorable ways. Yet each of these men could, when he chose, or when his better earnestness asserted itself, write as simply and plainly as any one else. One of the worst offenders, in the later euphuistic way, Richard Lovelace, ran wild at times in the forced ingenuity and silliness of his conceits. Yet he has left us, as we all know, three of the most perfect lyrics in the language; and no one would wish a word altered in "When love, with unconfined wings," or "Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind." I should be ashamed to repeat such truisms of criticism as this were it not that, though we all know the facts, we may not all have learned the true lesson from them. When Lovelace wrote a sonnet to his mistress's glove, and compared it to an estate with five various-sized farms upon it, these farms being the four fingers and thumb; when Cleveland, in a poem to Julia "to expedite her promise," compares "the object of his affections to an advowson, her rate of life to the Gregorian calendar, her coyness to the obstinate resistance of Ostend, and her tears to the Pool of Bethesda," these men were really

following a fashion, not necessarily from any love for it, but because they thought it was expected from them. They really believed that it was so that readers of poetry liked to be regaled. One can hardly say that they believed this sort of thing would *pay*, in the vulgar sense of that term, for as yet literature had hardly been formulated into a profession; but in the sense that it would be popular because of this quality, they certainly believed it. And so, I repeat, we should call their vice imitation rather than affectation. The affectation had taken place a long way back, but these later men did not originate, they followed. Their misfortune was that "heredity" which our friends, the Ibsenites, so delight to dally with. A proverb has been defined as the "wit of one and the wisdom of many." And euphuism all along its course, and in all its various species and varieties, may be similarly defined as the ingenuity of one and the silliness of the remainder.

And all this time, let us not forget, the wise men and the true humourists were noting and lamenting, or mocking, as their bent was, this vice of unreality and fashion-following. Roger Ascham had laid down one of the noblest of literary canons when he advised his disciples to *think* with the philosophers, but to *write* like ordinary people—a rule never palatable to the majority of writers, for it is never easy to think wisely, but very easy to cultivate any style to order. Cervantes, in his immortal work, though

he had higher game to fly at than literary artifice, was pronouncing one long condemnation upon that which is at the root of all artificiality. It is not true that he "laughed Spain's chivalry away"; he had no such intention. But he did laugh away what, by a slightly forced metaphor, we will call the "euphuism of chivalry." And in France, Molière found in the euphuism of his own fashionable world the opportunity of saying the truest words in jest. Who has ever doubted that Molière himself is speaking out his own frank contempt when, in that immortal scene, he shows his misanthrope making mincemeat of the Maudles and Postlethwaites of the day? —when he declares that thinking, not exactly with the wise, but from the deep "general heart of man," and using the language that that heart dictates, is nearer to the spirit of genuine poetry than all the "colifichets" of the fashionable sonnet? It was but stating a fact that might have been restated in the same terms a century and a half later, when Burns arose to discontent men with the "mere mechanic art" that poetry had then dwindled to. We can imagine some one seizing upon some such lyric as

> Of a' the airts the wind can blaw,
> I dearly like the west,
> For there the bonnie lassie lives,
> The lassie I lo'e best,

and quoting it against the worn-out versification

of the eighteenth century, even as against the dainty dexterity of M. Oronte, Alceste quotes,

> J'aime mieux ma mie, oh gay!
> J'aime mieux ma mie,

and adds, "Voilà d'un cœur vraiment épris." However, as the phrase used to be, "I am anticipating." In my very desultory survey we have come to the end of the seventeenth century; and from and after the beginning of the eighteenth, euphuism, as a continuous erratic force in literature, is by no means dead; but it begins to take forms which connect themselves more distinctively with the genius of individual writers. The euphuism which owes its name to Lyly's book owes it to the accident that Lyly made popular an already existing fashion. He formulated it, he crystallised it into a shape handy for general imitation, and it is not wonderful that his name henceforth stuck to it. And in the case of later euphuisms that we have now reached, and which we attribute to particular writers, that same "heredity" may still exist, though its springs are now hidden from us. Take, for instance, the alleged founder of a poetic form that lived for nearly a hundred years afterwards — Alexander Pope. We talk inevitably of the school of Pope, but Pope, great genius and artist as he was, did not invent his own style. He, too, had literary progenitors. But Pope left the impress of his genius on the verse we know so well; and if

we admit that it engendered a permanent literary mannerism, it is not unfair to call it the euphuism of Pope. Only we are to bear in mind that the euphuism of any original writer begins with his imitators, not with himself.

Some three generations of Popian "euphuists" were destined to be the result of the great man's influence: writers of verse who adopted his couplet, his rhythms and pauses, and his diction; the best of these having native gifts of their own which more than compensated for the adoption of a hackneyed medium of expression; men of real distinction, such as Goldsmith and Crabbe; men with original gifts of wit and satire, like Cowper and Samuel Johnson. But we forget (for, luckily, they do not live to trouble us) the rank and file of the Popian euphuists, the "mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease" because Pope, above all men, had first shown them the "trick of it." The poetic diction, which, when all life had died out of it, Wordsworth dissected in his famous Prefaces—a diction which too often disturbs our pleasure even in the loveliest passages of Goldsmith or Gray—the *gale*, the *mead*, the *zephyr*, the *swain*, the *nymph*, and all the rest of it—this was the poetic euphuism of the last century, and it has gone the inevitable way of all euphuisms, illustrating once more that first command of the Poetical Decalogue, "Thou shalt not copy." At least, you *may* copy, and you will win a day's applause by being in the

fashion, but you shall not *live*, and you shall forfeit your claim to poetic greatness.

I can only briefly indicate some of the other euphuisms of the century—there were prose euphuisms, as well as verse. The author of *Tristram Shandy* was a true genius, but he bequeathed a *manner* to many who could copy it after a fashion but for obvious reasons could borrow nothing else, so that that which is still fresh and living in Sterne is dead, because hopelessly *fade* and mawkish, in a Mackenzie. There was a Johnsonian euphuism beloved of those who could imitate the rounded sentences and the ponderous verbosity of the *Rambler*, but who were miles off the moral sagacity and the shrewd humour of their original. And so the Johnsonian euphuists in their turn are dead and buried. And coming at last to our own century, the euphuisms begin to multiply. If the old effete *classical* methods had theirs, the new romantic reaction was to have its own. Walter Scott was to found a euphuism, and so was Byron. "Inimitable," in very truth, in all that places him on his high pedestal, yet Scott, in his treatment of mediæval life, and generally of the heroic element in his novels, did expose himself to imitation; and Thackeray in his *Rebecca and Rowena* (perhaps the cleverest, sweetest, and most charming parody in our literature) has shown how the Scott manner may be reproduced so as not to be mistaken. The *best* of Lord Byron, again, could

not be copied; the best of no man can be copied; but Macaulay has reminded us, in a passage we all remember, how his imitators "did their best to write like him and to look like him"; how "for some years the Minerva Press sent forth no novel without a mysterious, unhappy, Lara-like peer"; and how "the number of hopeful undergraduates and medical students who became things of dark imaginings, on whom the freshness of the heart ceased to fall like dew," passed all calculation.

Then, coming down to times within the recollection of most of us, we recall, among others of less note, two remarkable euphuisms, the Dickens and the Carlyle. It was far from being a distinction peculiar to Browning's Mr. Gigadibs that he could write an article on the "Slum and Cellar" that passed for the "true Dickens." There was a host of Mr. Gigadibses at that period who could do the same. In the early days of *Household Words* there was a whole school of writers in that periodical who contrived so to model their style upon their editor's that, like the wonderful "leaf-insect" on the leaf, it was often all but impossible to distinguish the imitative insect from the tree that it had settled on. Then there was the Carlyle euphuism—a portentous reality which was at its height some thirty or forty years ago, and which in its turn has "had its day and ceased to be." When Carlyle's matured style came to the world

fresh from the master's hand, there were many to call it even then, *affectation*. But it was not affectation. Those who looked below the surface knew that it was organically connected with the mind and genius of the writer — his poetry, imagination, and wit, modified no doubt by certain foreign models that had helped to fertilise his mind. But it was otherwise with the Carlyle euphuists. Persons who shared little else with Carlyle fancied that they could imitate him (so to speak) "from the top downwards"—that they could wield his weapons and produce his effects by merely putting on his clothes—a new aspect of *Sartor Resartus* which might have added another chapter to that immortal work. Nor was this euphuism a merely harmless thing, to be smiled at and passed by. It had lamentable effects while it lasted, and there were grave and admirable scholars who could write, and had before written, "like men of this world," who succumbed to the new fashion, and for a time wrote in a style neither their own nor Carlyle's, nor any one else's, but a strange hybrid jargon that might have made angels weep.

Then, turning from prose to poetry, there was the Tennyson euphuism. After the year 1842, when the two volumes appeared which made Tennyson for the first time a great popular influence, his strong individual style began to make men wonder where he had "picked it up," and a euphuism was accordingly seen, sooner or

later, to be the result. We all know how it grew. At first, in pursuance of a law attending the appearance of a markedly original writer, there were those who demurred to the poet's style as unreal—artificial; then in due course, and with more experience, men felt it to be genuine; and it became accepted. Then it was imitated; and once again it became a by-word for unreality—a process in describing which, as you have recognised, I am but turning into bald prose what years after, in a curious fit of natural irritation, Tennyson himself concentrated into his little fable. It is worth quoting once more, for it puts, unintentionally, the whole history and moral of euphuism in a nutshell.

Once in a golden hour
I cast to earth a seed.
Up there came a flower,
The people said, a weed.

To and fro they went
Thro' my garden-bower,
And muttering discontent
Cursed me and my flower.

Then it grew so tall
It wore a crown of light,
But thieves from o'er the wall
Stole the seed by night.

Sow'd it far and wide
By every town and tower,
Till all the people cried,
'Splendid is the flower.'

Read my little fable:
He that runs may read.
Most can raise the flowers now,
For all have got the seed.

And some are pretty enough
And some are poor indeed;
And now again the people
Call it but a weed.

Only, in his brilliant little allegory, Lord Tennyson modestly veils the actual truth. Nobody was found who actually could "raise the flower," any more than any one could pilfer the "real seed." All that could be raised from the stolen seed was an artificial flower, which, no doubt, many persons, with not much sense of smell and but imperfect eyesight, for a while mistook for the natural one; but it only required a little time and testing to prove the difference. We have had since whole gardens full of this sort—Tennysonian euphuism, Tennysonian "echoes—little worth"—and these, too, have passed for a while as literature, and then have gone the inevitable way into the limbo of all imitations.

There have been other poetic euphuisms since the Tennysonian. Browning has hardly founded one, not so much because he is difficult to imitate as because he is difficult to imitate without appearing to parody. But we have witnessed in turn a Rossetti euphuism and a Swinburne euphuism, the characteristics of which are familiar enough to you. Each of these eminent poets has

a manner which can be copied, and they have been copied abundantly. Mr. Matthew Arnold, a poet in whom thought is more dominant than any metrical individuality, has had his influence too, but just for that reason he is less easy to imitate. But though Mr. Arnold has hardly left us a poetic euphuism, he has helped (at least) to leave us one in prose; and in this respect, though it seems ludicrous enough to compare him with John Lyly, there remains a certain parallel between a euphuism that was the delight of the scholars surrounding Queen Elizabeth, and another that has been for some years past the delight of a similar class in our own land. For here history has closely repeated itself, and for some years we have had a class of writers employing a euphuism not due to the influence of any one model, but growing out of a new "exhilaration of culture." A modern so-called revival of learning, a sort of a nineteenth-century renaissance, has led our ambitious young men and women to invent a corresponding diction, which shall difference them from that of ordinary plain-speaking people. And though I have mentioned Mr. Matthew Arnold's name in introducing the topic, let me guard myself against seeming to rank that true scholar and poet with a school to which his example no doubt contributed something, but for which he cannot be held answerable. Mr. Arnold made many striking and novel additions to the vocabulary of art-criticism; some he borrowed from the French

critics, some he invented, and certainly it gave him a mannerism of his own, which, however (as always happens), fell off from him when he was most in earnest, and when his style often rose to the eloquence of genuine simplicity. But his phrases were eagerly caught up by the new euphuists—used in season and out of it—and a new language was the result, the language of what they called culture. This language is familiar to us all. It has been caricatured and ridiculed over and over again, but it lives on, for it is the sole stock-in-trade of many of its possessors. The columns of certain literary journals display it constantly. We know it at a glance. We know that whatever new poem or new play it is that is being criticised, we shall find the changes rung on the old glossary, we shall meet the old substantives, adjectives, and adverbs;—"work" (this artist's "work"), every other line; "intense," "supreme," "subtle," "precious," "distinctly," "accentuated," "convincing," "incisive," "value," "charm"; the solemn application of these terms to writings often ludicrously unworthy of criticism at all; analysing the performance of the latest droll, and assuring us that his representation of Mr. Wilcox Gibbs in *My Aunt's Sewing-Machine* is something we cannot "afford to neglect." For the "note" (as they would style it) of these critics is that they are one and all totally destitute of humour, and could not by any possibility write as they do if they possessed a grain of it! I am speaking, of course, of the

rank and file of those following this strange *cultus*, but the trail of this euphuism is over the style even of their betters. The aim at giving better bread than ordinary men eat—to exhibit "Distinction"—is at the root of it all. And we have met, I think, with writers of genuine scholarship who have attained such perfection in this kind that their admirers claim for them that they write the best English of their day—the effect of whose style is something analogous to that of entering, some fine spring day, into the hottest of the tropical houses at the Botanic Gardens. For five minutes the effect is magical. How warm, how sweet, how balmy, and those tropical flowers how aromatic; but after those five minutes we feel nothing but a desire to get out from the closeness and the perfume into the open air, and Nature left to herself. For we may expel her with a fork, but she will come back!

My friend Mr. Edmund Gosse has lately published a very interesting essay with the somewhat alarming title, *Is Verse in Danger?* He was led to ask this serious question by the increasing neglect that he noticed of new poetry given to the world. For poetry by living men, he seems to notice, finds fewer and fewer readers. However well spoken of by the critics, "laudatur et alget"—it gets its praise, and dies. Of course Mr. Gosse would recognise, with all of us, certain obvious exceptions to the rule. Our oldest and most eminent living poet—there are assuredly no

signs that *his* popularity is on the wane. And, at what may be called the other end of the scale, for verse treating in a commonplace way certain interests intelligible to the ordinary intellect, reflecting in more or less facile blank verse sentiments and thoughts familiar to the uneducated, there is also still a very large public. But Mr. Gosse, I am sure, means a class of poets standing apart from these two extremes—men of culture and trained metrical faculty, of which our time affords so many examples. It is these (I gather) that complain of neglect. And Mr. Gosse seems to think that there must be hypocrisy somewhere about, for that the same persons who will eagerly buy and study any fresh reprint of a minor (perhaps a very minor) Elizabethan poet, yet have no attention to spare for the minor poets of to-day. Mr. Gosse sees inconsistency here, but I venture to think he overlooks the fact, that to any verse written three hundred years ago belong many interests quite distinct from literary merit. It has an historical and an antiquarian interest; and the age that produced it was so wonderful that we cannot (as our friends the euphuists put it) "afford to neglect" any new evidence that might perchance throw a little fresh light upon persons and things of more consequence than itself. If we heard to-morrow that Mr. A. H. Bullen had come upon a hitherto unknown songster of Shakspeare's time, we should all be eager to welcome the newcomer. It might easily prove to be very mediocre

stuff; but also it might throw light upon other singing-birds of that time—it might even contain an allusion to Shakspeare, or illustrate one of his plays or a passage in one. Therefore I submit it is not necessarily hypocrisy that we are interested in one minor poet and not in another. Some other reason must be looked for. Nor is it sufficient to quote again Horace's hackneyed saying that mediocre verse has no right to exist —that neither gods nor men nor "the Trade" can away with it—for, out of very mediocre verse indeed "the Trade" have in their time made large fortunes. But the writers Mr. Gosse has in view are not of this class. To do them justice, they would not wish to be; and again to do them justice, they could not be if they did wish it. For to address successfully the commonplace, you must be yourself commonplace; and they are not that. They have accomplishments quite their own, though somehow they fail to tell. Why is this? Well, a parallel from a sister art may be invoked. The followers of Richard Wagner have one special aversion, and that is Mendelssohn; and what they affirm about Mendelssohn is this, that "he had nothing to say, and said it charmingly." Now, I cannot endorse this judgment. It seems to me a monstrous thing to say of the composer of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* music and the *Elijah.* But the formula is useful for other purposes; and it fairly describes the strength and the weakness

of a vast bulk of the literature of a highly cultured age. It is beautifully written—the art of expression seems to have reached its climax—but what else? What is there besides? Can men live upon this food; and if not, can the food itself live? Has it not in itself the seeds of ultimate death? A friend of mine used to affirm that once, at a foreign *table d'hôte*, he read on the wine-carte, framed for the benefit of us British, the following proud boast: "The wines at this establishment are of such a quality as to leave Mr. Traveller absolutely nothing further to hope for." Of how many volumes of verse is not this the true epitaph! On reaching the end, after wondering how well it is all written, we are forced to the conclusion that the wines of this establishment leave nothing further to hope for; and that any future volumes from the same source would be equally well written, and equally devoid of anything of permanent interest for mankind!

And what has this to do, you ask, with euphuism? Well, I have tried to show that the essence of euphuism is not affectation, that is to say, not originality (even misdirected originality), but rather the reverse of originality—the copying of others, when one has not much or anything to say of one's own. This is euphuism, whether it take shape in fantastic tricks of style, in the slavish following of particular models, in slang (which is the euphuism of conversation), or in the general desire to be superfine and belong to a

literary caste. Wherever manner is cultivated, there is euphuism; and no manner is worth anything in literature that is not originally related to the matter it clothes. Individuality is the soul of literature. That alone gives a writer a chance of taking his place in that noble category. Will individuality alone confer it? Certainly not. The quality that makes a writer live beyond his own generation, and be re-read and quoted and survive all swingings of the pendulum between excessive praise and excessive dispraise, what is it? Who can define it? What is charm—the magic that never fades from out some short lyric, some short essay—a salt of which the savour never exhales? How many of those of our own day who seem, with the best judging among us, to possess it will possess it for our grandchildren? The issues of literary fame are beyond our ken. But one thing is certain, it is better to be original, if only for a day, than to follow fashions and euphuism. It is better to be one's self and die than never to have been one's self at all!

SWIFT—HIS LIFE AND GENIUS

I

WHEN the subject of these lectures was first announced, an eminent man of science was so kind as to tell me that he much approved of that subject, and that he hoped he might be able to be present, because, he said, Swift was to him "little more than a name." Now it is never right to take comfort from a fellow-creature's admission of ignorance, but I am bound to say the confession gave me some encouragement. For it was partly because I believed this ignorance to be true of many persons, even those interested in English literature, that I chose the subject. And the reasons for this state of things are not far to seek. In the first place, Swift is a voluminous (as well as most luminous) writer, and the mere bulk of any author has always an effect of warning off beginners. Then, if Swift is not of unequal strength or wit, he is indubitably unequal in power of attraction, for much of his writing was concerned with politics and questions of his time which have

comparatively small interest, save for the student of history, and it would be quite easy for any one approaching him to take hold of him "by the wrong end," and so be disappointed and proceed no farther. Indeed, many persons seem somehow to have the gift of always thus missing such a chance, and sometimes, I fear, even of taking a pleasure in it. All writers of marked originality require a guide for the beginner, lest, for example, they approach Shakspeare by the *Comedy of Errors*, Chaucer by the *Romaunt of the Rose*, or Wordsworth by *Julia and Vaudracour*. But there is another and a graver cause of Swift's unpopularity, or rather of his non-appearance in the family library. He had an extreme and peculiarly disagreeable love of the coarse and the offensive. It was connected, I believe, with a morbid condition (I do not say mania) which affected other sides of his temperament. But this coarseness does not pervade his work. It affects but a small minority of his writings; it is not, as in Sterne, a thread which runs through and taints with a sense of impurity everything he ever wrote, making it impossible to disengage and destroy it. In Swift it can be cut away, and thrown away, like the offal of a carcase, leaving the whole body otherwise healthy and nutritious. Nevertheless until comparatively lately no editions of Swift had been thought of with regard to the family circle. But within the last two or three years Mr. Henry Craik,[1]

[1] [Now Sir Henry Craik, K.C.B.]

the author of quite the best biography of Swift, has given us, through the Clarendon Press, two volumes of selections from Swift, admirably edited with notes and prefaces, and with slight exception representing Swift's writings in all their many-sidedness. These two volumes I confidently recommend to any of my audience who wish seriously to obtain an all-round view of Swift's genius, and, as I believe, an intellectual pleasure they may never have dreamed of.

When Thackeray treated of Swift in his well-known lectures, he was considering, he said, the humourists of Queen Anne's time—the men themselves, that is to say, rather than their writings. It is my intention not exactly to reverse this order, but rather to speak of the books as well as of the man, and in common with his life. And for, I think, a sufficient reason — that the man is already better known than his books. The romantic interest of his career, as it affected others, and notably two charming and ill-fated women, has caused his story to be widely popular. Thackeray has done much in the lectures just named to diffuse the story, and a clever novelist of our own time has taken it as the basis of a romance.[1] The theme has struck the imagination of foreigners also, and I have an indistinct recollection of a French drama on the subject, in which I recall nothing, however, but a pleasant idyllic touch where Swift and the child Stella play

[1] [*Esther Vanhomrigh*, by Mrs. Margaret Woods.]

at battledore and shuttlecock in the Moor Park library. But with the exception of some school-room version of *Gulliver*, and the fragments of the *Polite Conversations* quoted by Mr. Thackeray, I suppose that to most people the bulk of Swift's satiric and ironic vein is all but unknown. It is well, however, that we may take something for granted in connection with Swift, for otherwise the title of my lectures, his "life and genius," would require not three, but a dozen lectures for their exposition. There are at least three aspects of Swift which might be treated separately: his life, with all its mysteries, as yet unsolved and certainly not to be solved by me; his political career, also not without mysteries; and his position as a prose-writer of rare and almost unique quality; a satirist of the first rank, and a master of irony which, if we cannot quite accept his own vaunt that he "was born to introduce it," he certainly used with a freshness and variety that leaves almost all other professors of that art far behind. Yet all these three sides of Swift touch and control each other so nearly that it is not possible to ignore any one of them. I will do my best to skim lightly over the motives or secrets of his purely political action, and if I state a view of these dogmatically, for brevity's sake, I shall know that you can correct my judgment at your leisure from any fuller biography.

It was one of Swift's ungallant sayings (he

was by no means always ungallant) that women are riddles, the interest in which is gone as soon as the answer is known. He himself was most surely a riddle, and there seems little prospect of the interest in it passing away for a like reason. And perhaps this may explain why, until lately, he had somehow warned off critics and biographers. It is disappointing, not to say humiliating, to grapple with these problems and leave them at the end still unsolved. There is, indeed, no end to the anomalies, contradictions, discords, in this man Swift. Born in Ireland, exercising his profession, and spending the greater part of his life there, the staunchest champion of that country's rights and privileges; dying there, and leaving his fortune for Irish uses, Swift was yet an Englishman; English by parentage on both sides, English in genius, English in character and in temperament; born and reared in poverty, and during the whole of his early manhood living in dependence and with crippled means, he had yet, when means came to him, a heart "open as day to melting charity," and capable of generosity, rarer grace even than liberality. His appearance presented the same incongruities. "His eyes," said his friend Pope, "are azure as the heavens, and have a surprising archness in them." "Sometimes," writes poor Vanessa, "you strike me with that prodigious awe, I tremble with fear; at other times a charming compassion shines through your countenance, which revives my soul." Proud,

fierce, resentful, with few of the graces that are supposed to win hearts, two of the most charming women were at his feet. One died of her love, of a broken heart, and the other chose the sadder fate of a protracted life, gladdened by his devotion and constant friendship, but cheated of her natural hopes, and content to be his wife (if indeed the ceremony was ever performed at all) only in name. Swift was a misanthrope in theory, and in much of his practice; yet what love he had for his friends, and what love they gave him in return! Many flattered him, I daresay, eager to propitiate that tremendous force and that unscrupulous tongue, but Pope and Gay and Arbuthnot had little to fear on that score. Pope had a sting of his own, which, had he chosen to use it, could have amply avenged anything Swift could have said or done towards him. A dozen lines in one of his satires might have for ever modified the world's view of Swift, just as in famous and familiar lines he affected the future reputation of Addison. No, there was that in Swift which in spite of misanthropy and all else made his friends love him. "My memory, my affection, my esteem," writes Pope, "are inseparable from you, and will, my dear friend, be for ever yours." And hear in return Swift's subtle tribute to these friends in the "Verses on his own Death"; notice the "inverted irony" by which, in the ostensible language of a grievance, he yet contrives to pay them the truest compliment:—

In Pope I cannot read a line
But with a sigh I wish it mine;
When he can in one couplet fix
More sense than I can do in six,
It gives me such a jealous fit,
I cry "plague take him and his wit."
I grieve to be outdone by Gay
In my own humorous biting way;
Arbuthnot is no more my friend
Who dares to irony pretend,
Which I was born to introduce;
Refined it first, and showed its use.
St. John, as well as Pulteney, knows
That I had some repute for prose,
And till they drove me out of date
Could maul a minister of state.
If they have mortified my pride,
And made me throw my pen aside;
If with such talents Heaven has blessed 'em
Have I not reason to detest 'em?

Thackeray quotes the saying of some lady that she could have borne Swift's cruelty for the sake of his tenderness. In this she marked an antithesis that runs through his life; and when we add to this the regularity of that life, contrasted with the cynical license of speech he at times allows himself; the daring treatment of religious subjects in his *Tale of a Tub*, with his own indubitable sense of religious need, and the disgust he felt for the vulgar irreligion of his day; when we note further the logical vigour, the piercing clearness of his intellect, contrasted with the element of disease, weighing on his nervous system from the beginning, growing more and

more intense, until the brain broke down altogether and left him for the last years of his life a helpless lunatic; I say we have here a mingled yarn indeed, problems sufficient to engage and defy the closest scrutiny of the student of human nature!

And now let me briefly summarise that portion of his life that concerns us to-day. Jonathan Swift was born in Dublin, in the year 1667; of English parents, and a posthumous child. Reared by his mother in great poverty, he was sent at the age of fourteen to Trinity College, Dublin, where, though his already irrepressible temper and impatience of discipline brought him into constant conflict with the college authorities, he must have contrived to read and think, and to lay the foundation of that vigorous and unadorned English style, which, when he first needed it, seemed to spring like Minerva, fully armed, from his brain. He graduated without distinction in 1685. He went on living, as he had thus far lived, on the charity of relations, until, that failing, he returned to England to his mother in Leicestershire, in 1688. He was just of age, and already soured and embittered by a sense of dependence, of failure, and of conscious ability unrecognised. And herein, I think, may be seen the first foundations of the temper that possessed him through life—a sense of vague resentment, with no clear excuse for it, against things in general. Mrs. Swift was connected by

marriage with the Whig statesman and diplomatist, Sir William Temple, and to his patronage she ventured to commend her son ; and the result was the admission of Swift into Temple's house at Moor Park, near Farnham, in Surrey, at the salary of £20 a year and his board, as secretary or literary assistant, or in any other capacity in which Temple might find him useful. The experiment was tried. In little more than a year Swift could bear it no longer, or else Temple couldn't. The secretary was proud, and thought he was not held of sufficient importance, and the master probably wearied of the uncertain temper of the servant. They quarrelled, and parted, Swift returning to Ireland. In another year the breach was healed, and Swift came back to Moor Park, this time for about three years, during which he read and wrote, using Temple's library to good purpose, and began, as almost all young men of such power begin, by writing poems. It is said by the cynical that most men write and print a volume of poems before they are twenty-five, and spend the rest of their life in striving to suppress the volume. Swift's poems were not of the order that most men seek to suppress. There was nothing in them which a more matured age could ridicule, nothing of the "precious" or the "bric-a-brac." He followed, indeed, the fashion of the hour, which was for the English imitation (so called) of the Pindaric ode, as made popular by Abraham Cowley. What Swift could imitate, he imitated:

the structure of the ode and the general treatment of the theme; the masculine style and wit he had no occasion to borrow, for it was his already. It is only just to Cowley to add that the best parts of him no one could borrow. It was impossible, moreover, that Swift should ever have ranked as a poet at all; and nothing is more futile than to discuss the question, as I have seen it, even seriously, discussed. Read his ode to Archbishop Sancroft, and I do not fear your differing from me. It has the lofty rhetoric, and the mannerism of Cowley, but little else. Dryden, who was a not very near relation of Swift's, is reported to have read these odes and to have remarked, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet." Swift, his biographers tell us, never forgave him, and never afterwards wrote or spoke cordially of "Glorious John." Of course he did not, yet Swift very soon made the same discovery for himself. He wrote abundance of verse in his after-life, but nothing, I think, to which he would have ventured to apply the term "poetry."

As to the bearing of these productions on the political or other bias of Swift's mind there displayed, it may just be mentioned that one is a perfunctory piece of compliment to William the Third, as befitted a secretary and dependant of Temple's, and another a very obviously genuine tribute to Sancroft as *non-juror*, a trustworthy piece of evidence as to Swift's early jealousy for

the rights of the Church of England—a jealousy which, as we shall see, followed him and controlled much of his life's action and his life's destinies to the very end. But the date of this last-named ode (1689), when Swift was but twenty-two, was the first year of his residence under Temple's roof, and the event introduced him to another and curiously different influence that was to make or mar his future life. In a cottage within the grounds of Moor Park dwelt a certain Mrs. Johnson, the widow of a former dependant of Temple's. Mrs. Johnson filled the post of companion and confidential friend to Temple's sister, Lady Giffard, who was one of the Moor Park household. With her were her two daughters, the elder of whom, Esther, just eight years old, was, from Swift's first introduction to the Temple family, placed to a certain extent under his care as pupil. In those words of terrible calmness written on the very night of her death, nearly forty years later, Swift looked back and recorded those early days with the method and precision of an obituary notice :—"She was born at Richmond, in Surrey, on the 13th day of March in the year 1681. Her father was a younger brother of a good family in Nottinghamshire, her mother of a lower degree, and indeed she had little to boast of her birth. I knew her from six years old" (this was a confusion of memory, by the way—she was *eight* when Swift went first to Moor Park), "and had some share in her education, by directing

what books she should read, and perpetually instructing her in the principles of honour and virtue, from which she never swerved in any one action or moment of her life. She was sickly from her childhood until about the age of fifteen, but then grew into perfect health, and was looked upon as one of the most beautiful, graceful, and agreeable young women in London, only a little too fat. Her hair was blacker than a raven, and every feature of her face in perfection." She was eleven years old when Swift entered on his second term of service under Temple's roof (Feb. 1692-May 1694), and it may be that then for the first time the child became his pupil, and fifteen when he returned for the last time (May 1696-Jan. 1699).

In 1694 the patron and dependant again parted company. Swift returned to Ireland to take holy orders, and was ordained in October of that year by the Bishop of Kildare. Six months later he proceeded to priest's orders, was presented by Lord Capel to the prebend of Kilroot, near Belfast, and then in little more than a year later found a deputy to hold Kilroot, and once more resumed residence with Temple at Moor Park. This was in 1696. The remote parish of Kilroot, containing a mere handful of Protestants, with little to do and no society, had soon tired this restless nature, growingly conscious of its great powers—powers pointing, moreover, to conquests in such different fields. He had quarrelled again and again with Temple, but Temple

was clear-sighted enough to see his value, and wanted him back. A last reconciliation was brought about, and Swift once more was at Moor Park—resigning Kilroot in 1697—till Temple's death in 1699. Meantime one incident of the preceding few years is to be noted as bearing on that intense and overweening pride which was to prove, I believe, the explanation of many of the unexplained things in Swift's career. He had always wished to take orders in the Anglican Church, but so sensitive was he to public criticism—perhaps even to his own—that he only took the step after he had been offered by Temple a sinecure post in Ireland which would have put him beyond the reach of want. That is to say, that he only took orders when it had become impossible for others, or for his own proud self, to allege that he entered that profession simply as a means of livelihood. In any case evidence begins henceforth to accumulate that this sensitive *pride* was growing in him, even as was the obscure and depressing malady which afflicted him through life, and the origin of which he himself attributed, as is well known, to a surfeit of stone-fruit while under Temple's roof. There was a taint of disease in Swift from the first, moral as well as physical, and we know that an overweening pride may possess a man until in the end "the potent poison quite o'er-crows the spirit." Without anticipating any final verdict upon Swift, it is well (I venture to think) that

we carry these truths with us as a possible clue to some of the mysteries that will meet us on our way.

And, indeed, if a growing sense of intellectual power were any justification or excuse for pride in poor human nature, Swift most surely did not lack it. For during those years of much reading and of contact with many ranks and many minds, from kings downwards—for King William himself was an occasional visitor at Moor Park—Jonathan Swift must have become surely aware of the possibilities within him. He had been a vast reader of ancient literature and of the most out-of-the-way authors. There remains a list (in his own hand) of books read in a single year, and with the industry of a Macaulay, he seems to have had something also of the great historian's memory. He was a glutton for books—English and French history, travel, criticism, controversial theology—anything that came handy, and out of this mixed cauldron, a strange brew, was to come his first satirical review of the vain controversies of mankind. In 1697 (he was then thirty) he appears to have been engaged upon both the *Tale of a Tub* and the *Battle of the Books*. Most persons have a general idea of the central incident of the *Tale of a Tub*, which deals with the growth of religious dissension in Christendom and the splitting up into churches and sects. The title of the satire is humorous simply, and has no special significance except what Swift himself assigned to it,

apparently as a humorous afterthought. *A Tale of a Tub* is a very old English phrase, meaning something like what later came to be called "A Story of a Cock and a Bull," and was the title, you may remember, of a comedy of Ben Jonson's. But with the aid of his fertile fancy Swift gravely informed his readers that as the sailors, when their ship was threatened by a whale, threw out a tub for that animal to play with, and so divert its attention, so he (Swift) had thrown out this tub to the critics to keep them employed while he was aiming at more serious and important designs! The *Tale of a Tub*, then (or at least the central core of it), is a satirical allegory upon the growing extravagances of the three main divisions of the Christian Church as known to Englishmen—the Roman Catholic, the Anglican Church, and the Protestant Nonconformists. These three Swift represents by three brothers, Peter, Martin, and Jack—the first name telling its own story; Martin, for Martin Luther, standing for the first stage of the Reformation; Jack, from John Calvin, for still further deviations from the pre-Reformation creed and use. That the extravagances which accompany all religious parties in their extremes have a ludicrous side, and one naturally tempting to the satirist, may be freely admitted, and no less so that, in composing his satire, Swift had no intention whatever of bringing the original fabric of Christianity, so to speak, into discredit or disrepute. Among the many strange things in this

strange character this may be safely assumed. But, without any *arrière pensée* of undermining Christian belief, without any profane intention, such a scheme as Swift's could not possibly be framed and worked out without results lowering to the dignity and prestige of the religion dealt with. In tracing the developments, or even the demoralisation, of doctrine and practice in Christian sects, the result was inevitable. Topics which, in their essential nature, command the reverence of all religious-minded men without distinction cannot safely be put in a ridiculous and degrading light. Hence was it that the strong common-sense of Queen Anne would not sanction the incongruity of the author of such a work becoming a bishop. Another eminent satirist in the clerical profession nearer to our own time will occur to us as having probably forfeited his chances of such promotion owing to his over-cultivation of the humorous faculty. Sydney Smith's case was a peculiarly hard one, considering the qualifications for a bishopric usually recognised in his day. With all our admiration for Swift's genius, and with frankest acceptance of the innocence of his intentions, we can hardly take the same view of *his*.

You will easily grasp the outline and the main details of Swift's satire. The three brothers just mentioned receive under their father's will a coat apiece, with solemn injunctions neither to add to it nor to diminish it, and the later treat-

ment of the coat by the three brothers after remaining in harmony for some years,—Peter by degrees adorning his coat with gold lace, which Martin finally strips off; Jack following his example with such impetuosity as to tear *his* coat completely down the back,—is perhaps harmless enough, and intelligible enough, without note or comment; but when such subjects as transubstantiation come to be treated in the same frankly facetious manner, you will readily understand that the writer treads upon more than doubtful ground, and that, for whatever purpose, such dealing with such topics is shocking to the religious sense, whatever be men's religious opinions. We will pass over such; but I may select a short paragraph in which a habit of theologians (of no one school of thought) is happily treated—a habit, I mean, of getting over difficulties by discovering that plain words are capable of very ingenious interpretation. The three brothers on one occasion were tempted to adorn their coats with silver fringe; they consult, accordingly, the original document, the will, in which their instructions are plainly written down. "Here, to their great astonishment, they found these words: 'I charge and command my three sons to wear no sort of silver fringe upon or about their said coats,' with a penalty in case of disobedience too long here to insert. However, after some pause, the brother so often mentioned for his erudition, who was well skilled in criticisms,

had found in a certain author, which he said should be *nameless*, that the same word which in the will is called *fringe* does also signify a *broomstick*, and doubtless ought to have the same interpretation in this paragraph. This another of the brothers disliked because of that epithet *silver*, which could not, he humbly conceived, in propriety of speech, be reasonably applied to a broomstick; but it was replied upon him that this epithet was used in a mythological and allegorical sense. However, he objected again, why their father should forbid them to wear a broomstick on their *coats*—a caution that seemed unnatural and impertinent; upon which he was taken up short, as one who spoke irreverently of a mystery, which doubtless was very useful and significant, but ought not to be over-curiously pried into, or nicely reasoned upon. And, in short, their father's authority being now considerably sunk, this expedient was allowed to serve as a lawful dispensation for wearing their full proportion of silver fringe." The satire here, you will notice, is the more trenchant that it is not directed against any one church or creed. The theological habit of silencing an opponent and getting over difficulties, in the first instance by discovering that words mean something quite different from what they seem to the plain intelligence, and in the next place by pleading an allegorical meaning, and lastly by frowning down the objector for attempting to fathom a mystery, is a habit so inherent in

religious controversy that it will not do perhaps for any of us to begin throwing stones. But though this theological allegory is the central incident of the satire, it is but the nucleus of the whole—a thread on which to string beads and ornaments, in the shape of multifarious reflections and jests on all human institutions, notably on literary or critical impostors. The prefaces and digressions form the larger part of the book, and far the ablest and most valuable. Another man might have invented Peter, Martin, and Jack; no other man in England could have poured forth the rest. Read the chapters on the critics, and the "Digression on Digressions," and the "Dedication to Prince Posterity." Here is the *true* Swift. Pope in a well-known line speaks of his friend as sitting in "Rabelais' easy-chair," but the likeness to the French master is more in that epithet "easy" than in the rest. Swift is not like Rabelais, I submit, save in one unfortunate respect—a frank and even brutal coarseness; but, like Rabelais in his easy-chair, he sits so loose to his subject that he can turn and laugh, and wander away, and is conscious of no obligation to reach a certain end in a certain time. But already there begins to appear in Swift that which differences him from Rabelais, and from all his own contemporaries who bear the name of satirist. What makes the *Tale of a Tub* so memorable and so gigantic a satire is this, that at the outset of Swift's career (like *Gulliver's Travels* at its conclusion) it is

not so much a satire as an impeachment of human nature. Behind the fallacies and follies and eccentricities that he ridicules stands the real object of his attack. He is always aiming, not at the apparent offender, but at the "man behind." We speak of Swift as a great satirist; but he is not one in the sense in which Addison and Pope are satirists. Addison looks smilingly on the follies and vanities of his kind, regarding them as the "windy ways of men"—dust that "lightly rises up, and is lightly laid again." Pope lashes the vices as well as the follies of his age, and even lashes individual fools and knaves, with instruments far more effective for his purpose than were possessed by Swift. But Swift's game is neither vice nor folly; he strikes at a more tremendous victim—at the creature *man*. His satire proper is but, as it were, the sparks that fly from him at his work. But the fire of his furnace is the fire of misanthropy. Human nature does not amuse him, or merely make him angry; it lashes him into scorn. And later on we must satisfy ourselves, as far as may be, as to the possible causes and the actual reality of this *saeva indignatio*.

Meantime, let us turn from this cynical, if not as yet misanthropic, review of human conduct in the *Tale of a Tub* to what is more properly a satire, as clever, as masterly in conception and working out, but sweeter, happier, lighter of touch—the *Battle of the Books*. Mr. Craik, or any

other biographer of Swift, will tell you at length the origin of this *jeu d'esprit*, as occasional, as personal almost, as that of the *Rape of the Lock*. It arose, in brief, out of a controversy begun in France amid the intellectual elation of the great period of Louis Quatorze, and then adopted and continued in England, as to the relative merits of ancient and modern literatures. Most persons have read Macaulay's highly coloured treatment of the subject in his Essay on Sir William Temple, but it is one that must be taken with some reservations. Temple had plunged into the controversy as the champion of the ancients with but moderate qualifications for the task in the shape of exact scholarship, and was so unfortunate as to base his decision in part on a work, the *Epistles of Phalaris*, which better scholars knew to be spurious. Swift, both on his own account and on his patron's, would have taken side with the ancients, and he saw a golden opportunity for a playful *jeu d'esprit* that should not so much defend Temple as effect a useful diversion from the real merits of the squabble, a very foolish and useless one at the best. He conceived the idea (and here again was an anticipation of Pope's method) of writing a mock-heroic, only in prose, and in burlesque of the Homeric manner ; the story of a battle between the books in the King's library, "last Friday," at St. James's, the combatants being the ancient and modern authors, all the familiar incidents being retained and imitated, the "machinery" in which

the gods and goddesses take part in the contest, each having his or her favourite, and intervening in their behalf, the episodes and similes interspersed, and the whole given as from an ancient and imperfect manuscript, with frequent *lacunae*, "hiatus valde deflendus," "hic multa desunt," and all the rest of it; this last-named feature enabling Swift to break off any incident or reflection when it threatened to become tiresome, and to make humorous capital even out of the incompleteness of his narrative. This at once bars any comparison with Pope's masterpiece as a work of art; and indeed a work of art it is not, save for the skill with which all the effects are produced; but a work of consummate wit, satire, and irony it undoubtedly is. All that marks Swift's later satire, when he came to deal in earnest with moral and political topics, is here in the germ, and with no drawbacks of doubtful taste either in reverence or decorum. There you will read how "the army of the ancients was much fewer in number than the moderns" (a world of useful reflection in this remark); how Homer led the horse and Pindar the light horse; Euclid was chief engineer; Plato and Aristotle commanded the bowmen; Herodotus and Livy the foot; Hippocrates the dragoons; the allies, led by Vossius and Temple, bringing up the rear. You will read how, among the moderns, the medical writers came to the front, "a vast body of dragoons, of different nations, under the leading

of Harvey . . . part armed with scythes, the weapons of death; part with lances and long knives, all steeped in poison; part shot bullets of a most malignant nature, and used white powder, which infallibly killed without report"; and how the great scholar Bentley, who had taken the side of the moderns, according to Swift (but he hadn't —he had only opposed "the ancients" on an incidental point), gave his superior officers, the modern generals, to understand that "he conceived, with great submission, they were all a pack of rogues and fools, and confounded loggerheads, and illiterate whelps, and nonsensical scoundrels." And though this very attack on Bentley (who *was* a head and shoulders taller than all other classical scholars of his day, and *knew it*) is fair satire, Swift must have known, and did know, that on such subjects as the *Epistles of Phalaris* he was worth a hundred such as Temple, who praised them, or Boyle, who edited them on his recommendation. There is a story of a late very eminent Parliamentary Counsel, that when at college he won the prize for an essay in defence of some established institution (I forget what), and that on some friends meeting him in the street and congratulating him, he replied, with a sorrowful countenance, "Ah! and I could have written such a much better one on the other side." And that, I fear I must say, we shall sometimes feel with regard to Swift's gigantic power and resource; that, under almost

any circumstances, he could have written, if not "a better one," at least one quite as good, on the opposite side. Another thing, also sufficing for the present, you will not have failed to observe—the power of a style, in which (according to superficial judgments) there is no style at all. I do not speak so much of this *Battle of the Books*, because it is a mock-heroic, and had to be written in burlesque fashion, but in the parts of it where, as in the famous episode of the "Bee and the Spider," it rises in seriousness and sobriety above the rest of the work. Naked strength and absolute lucidity are the two chief marks of Swift's serious style, and are a most valuable lesson to those who are meditating *what* style they shall write in, or whose it is safest to copy. There is an admirable remark of James Russell Lowell in one of those delightful letters lately published, where he says that any man who consciously aims at originality thereby implicitly confesses that he has none of his own: an observation which strikes very far and wide, and puts justly out of court a vast bulk of prose and poetry launched upon the world. And Swift eminently illustrates the great truth by an opposite course of action. I doubt if, apart from the occasions when he was deliberately burlesquing, there is in his prose a single sentence of rhetoric or fine writing, or attempt to influence and affect the reader by any artifice other than the cogency of the argument or the illustration. His style in controversial literature is the very triumph of

"plain language" and naked reasoning. And yet it wins every reader's admiration from this very union of clearness and strength. Like the sword of the Spanish warrior in the ballad—

> Ornament it carries none,
> But the notches on the blade.

In January 1699 Sir William Temple died, leaving Swift his literary executor, with some trifling legacy attached. Meantime professional prospects were dismal as ever. Hints of possible preferment had come to him from time to time, but nothing was done; and as a stop-gap Swift accepted the post of chaplain to Lord Berkeley, then going to Ireland, to the Castle in Dublin, as one of the Lord Justices. The post of secretary was to have been his as well, but this (which he desired most) was finally given elsewhere. Then successive posts of dignity in the Church in Ireland fell vacant, and still nothing came of it until, after a year's residence at the Castle, he received as a sop the united livings of Laracor and two others in County Meath, with a total income of some £200 a year. A *locum tenens* was found, as usual in those days, and on Lord Berkeley's recall to London in 1702, Swift followed him, to plunge at once into the political strife of the hour. He was as yet still a Whig, after the Temple pattern, and his first political pamphlet on the *Dissensions at Athens and Rome* was in support of the party,

and at once marked him out as a writer whom it would be the interest of any party in the State to secure.

In this same year Stella, who had remained thus far with her mother at Moor Park, resolved to settle in Ireland. Her mother was contemplating a second marriage, and Stella desired her own home. She had but a moderate fortune, and good interest on her capital was a first necessity. This could be got in Ireland and nowhere else. There was a poor relation of the Temples, one of the strange company clustered round Moor Park, a certain Mrs. Rebecca Dingley —some years older than Stella—who now agreed to throw in her lot with Stella, and follow her wherever she might settle. She remained as Stella's humble companion and chaperon till the latter's death, nearly thirty years longer. Between Laracor, Dublin, and England, Swift spent the next few years. Laracor was not far from Dublin, and communication with Stella and Mrs. Dingley was easy. At Laracor, what with his garden and his fruit-trees, Swift was not altogether without amusement, although his congregation was often scant, and although on emergency he had to address his clerk as "Dearly beloved Roger, the Scripture moveth you and me in sundry places." In 1702 and 1703 Swift was in England, and in 1704 he resolved on the step of publishing the two masterpieces we have reviewed to-day. They were given to the world anonymously, but their

authorship could never from the first have been a secret.[1]

This period was perhaps the least unhappy of a life that could never have been anything else than unhappy. From the first he was poor, he was living in dependence on others; he was intensely proud and sensitive; he had to bear one disappointment and mortification after another; and he was the victim of some obscure malady in the neighbourhood of the brain which did not mean a gradual insanity, but did mean a constant depression of nerves and spirits. On the other hand, he was still young; he had grown conscious of tremendous powers residing in himself; he had tasted of the delights of fame and the appreciation of those whose judgments he most valued; the friendship with Stella was more to him as years advanced, and the critical question of marrying or not marrying had not become urgent. Things were in suspense, but they were of such a kind that they could not remain so much longer. There are errors of *judgment*

[1] [Atterbury writes (15th June 1704) to Bishop Trelawny: "I beg your lordship to read the *Tale of a Tub*, for bating the profaneness of it, it is a book to be valued, being an original of its kind, full of wit, humour, good sense, and learning. The town is wonderfully pleased with it." A fortnight later he writes: "The authors of *A Tale of a Tub* are now supposed generally at Oxford to be one Smith and one Philips, the first a student, the second a Commoner of Christ Church"; but three days later he seems to have got wind of the real author, for he writes: "The author of *A Tale of a Tub* will not as yet be known; and if it be the man I guess, he hath reason to conceal himself, because of the profane strokes in that piece, which would do his reputation and interest in the world more harm than the wit can do him good."]

as well as "pleasant vices" of which the just gods "make instruments to plague us," and of such errors, assisted by an irony of fate that Swift could not have foreseen, he was soon, poor man, to reap the harvest.

SWIFT—HIS LIFE AND GENIUS

II

We left Swift at his country living of Laracor, or at least nominally there, for with a small parish, and little squeamishness in those days as to non-residence, visits to England were easily managed; and as he remained in close touch with the church for the rest of his life—he was not Dean of St. Patrick's till 1713,—this may be a fit juncture to inquire of what nature this churchmanship was. There was a political side to his churchmanship, with which we can only briefly deal. Swift was what in those days was called a high churchman, only we must carefully disengage this, like other political badges of that time, from any association with modern applications of them. A high churchman, in Swift's day, was one who magnified the position of the church, its independence, its rights, privileges, and dignity. Whatever theological or spiritual suggestions his churchmanship had were subordinate. Swift, from the first, had apparently resolved to hold a perpetual brief for his cloth. And this it was, as much as anything

else, that early dissolved his connexion, never more than an accidental and temporary one, with the Whigs. Association with Temple had identified him for a while with the party; when Temple had passed away, it was merely a matter of time when he should throw in his lot with their opponents. Swift's visits to England between 1702 and 1707 had for their main business to assert and defend certain alleged rights of the Irish Church. Again, as to his own sense of the responsibilities of the clerical office, there is no evidence, as far as I know (and in the case of a man with so many enemies as Swift this is important), that he was either remiss in his ministrations, or irregular,[1] or flippant. What was according to public opinion of that day a clergyman's "duty," he seems always to have faithfully discharged.[1] As to his "personal religion," it is neither charitable nor indeed possible to inquire. Mr. Thackeray ventures to pronounce that "Swift was a devout spirit. Swift could love and could pray," which is perhaps a little strong; but it would be quite as strong, and probably quite as wrong, to pronounce the opposite. Mr. Thackeray, indeed, goes on to modify his judgment by expressing his belief that Swift was a sceptic, and was made wretched by being tied to a church the doctrines of which he could not believe. But this I believe to be

[1] [This is understated. Swift *instituted* a weekly communion at St. Patrick's, and was remarkable for his *regular* attendance at services.]

stronger and wronger still. Except what we, standing on such a different level in these matters, might naturally infer from the daring treatment of sacred subjects in the *Tale of a Tub*, there is not, I think, a grain of evidence that Swift had what are ordinarily called religious doubts or difficulties. Neither science nor literary criticism entered into men's study of such matters then, and for critics, as we know, Swift entertained the sublimest contempt. And, moreover, the lives and general morale of the men around him, who affected sceptical views and adopted "deism," which was the chief educated form of opposition to Christianity, did not command his sympathy. As Swift looked out upon the world of political society, or at least upon such as came within his range, he saw, what Bishop Butler saw, and adopted as the text of his great work some thirty years later, namely, that "Religion had come to be not even an open question, but was finally exploded." But Swift's mind and genius were widely different from Butler's. It was not for him to champion the forsaken cause with any such weapons as the great bishop. He had not the equipment, nor the patience, nor the adequate sympathy. When, in the remarkable treatise we are now to consider, he poured the vials of his scorn upon the light-hearted freethinkers about him, it was not so much, it may be argued, from jealousy for an outraged faith as from the depth of his scorn for the outragers. Strange as it may

sound, the fact that the wits and men of fashion, of whom he saw most in London, affected contempt for the established religion would be to Swift the strongest argument for believing that such religion was true. How great the affection he bore to the religion we cannot say, but he certainly loathed many of its avowed enemies.

However, to turn from Swift's motives to his methods, we have, perhaps, in this extraordinary production the finest specimen of that literary art on which he prided himself most, which is known as *irony*. I referred in my last lecture to some lines of Swift's in which he speaks of himself as born to "introduce irony," to refine it and show its use. The first portion of this boast is a trifle arrogant, and certainly not true. There was living at the very time Swift made the boast, a strong and vigorous writer, somewhat looked down upon by Swift and his set, but to whom Swift owed more than he would have cared to allow, who had used irony before him with undeniable success, and that was Daniel Defoe. *Gulliver's Travels*, as we shall see, owed something to *Robinson Crusoe*, but earlier than that Swift's method of political and other controversy really took up irony where Defoe left it. And it is quite true that Swift refined it, and showed its "uses," for the versatility of his resource in its exercise is indeed remarkable. For what is *irony*? Well, roughly speaking, it is the setting forth of statement or argument in language which shall

seem to express and enforce one meaning, when it is really driving home, commending, and enforcing one very different. Irony is an argumentative practical joke by which the hearer is either actually bamboozled and made a fool of, or is allowed the pleasure of enjoying the skill with which the thing is done, the intellectual *tour de force*, though he is not himself taken in by it. In its rudest, most elementary shape, it is the former of these. Some dozen years before Swift wrote the argument against abolishing Christianity, Defoe had published his memorable tract, called *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters.* In the character of an ardent Tory and churchman, he (being a sturdy dissenter and enemy of this position) had expressed his conviction that the only method of dealing with dissenters (and it was at a time when the Bill against occasional conformity and other measures were deeply incensing them) was a root and branch extirpation, shrift short and sharp. It was written with such skill of apparent sincerity that for the moment the irony was universally missed. It was joyfully hailed by the very persons in contempt and loathing of whom it was composed. Then after a while the hoax was discovered ; the Government of the day was wild with rage at having been made fools of, and to their eternal disgrace hunted down the author and put him in the pillory. This is irony in its elementary form, and is, in point of fact, what I have called it, a *practical joke.*

It was what was called in Swift's day a "bite," a term to be superseded in time by a "hoax" or a "sell." It consists of telling an elaborate fable, or stating an apparently honest conviction, and then when the hearer takes it seriously, turning upon him with the cry, "Oh, you April fool!" But irony assumes a different character when it is used as a mental or moral tonic to awaken interest suddenly, to shock an opponent out of his confidence of belief, to drive home some moral or intellectual truth, to bring error or wickedness into contempt. If it does this in any degree, the intellectual use of the "bite" may be justified. Our favourite illustration in the ancient world was the famous irony of Socrates, by which that great man gradually, by apparent agreement with or acceptance of his opponents' position, landed them in hopeless contradictions. This was his "practical joke" upon the Sophists, and they did not like it, and we know with what results. The application of the method is boundless, and any new wielder of the weapon will develop his own special use of it. Defoe by stating the arguments of his enemies in their naked deformity held them up to the world's execration. By simply denouncing them, he would simply have been one more dissenter up in arms. His object was to shock the public conscience by the process of apparent agreement with the offending parties. Here, again, is an elementary and not very subtle use of the instrument. Though very effective for its

purpose, yet, considered as a weapon, it is to Swift's methods as a bill-hook is to a surgeon's operating-knife. Both Defoe and Swift were indignantly bent on showing up their opponents: in one case, the hard and cruel type of fanatical oppressor—of the Dr. Sacheverell type;—in the other, the corrupt and vicious men who affected to have found out religion, because in point of fact religion had found out *them*. And the serious argument, as here framed by Swift, is one of the most scathing pieces of sarcasm clothed in the most skilful and subtle pretence of seriousness that not only Swift, but probably any one else, ever produced on a like occasion. The full title of the tract, which was written in the year 1708 during a residence in England, is as follows:—"An Argument to prove that the Abolishing of Christianity in England may, as things now stand, be attended with some Inconveniences, and perhaps not produce those many Good Effects proposed thereby." And it is itself a consummate stroke of sarcasm that at the outset Swift relieves himself of any responsibility for treating such a serious question ironically at all, by presuming that of course his argument is not meant to touch a real and vital religion exercising any appreciable influence over men's conduct, for *that* (he says), of course, has long ago disappeared from our civilisation:—

Here, I would not be mistaken, and must therefore be so bold as to borrow a distinction from the

writers on the other side, when they make a difference between nominal and real Trinitarians. I hope no reader imagines me so weak to stand up in the defence of real Christianity, such as used, in primitive times (if we may believe the authors of those ages), to have an influence upon men's belief and actions; to offer at the restoring of that would indeed be a wild project; it would be to dig up foundations; to destroy, at one blow, all the wit and half the learning of the kingdom; to break the entire frame and constitution of things; to ruin trade, extinguish arts and sciences, with the professors of them; in short, to turn our courts, exchanges, and shops into deserts; and would be full as absurd as the proposal of Horace, where he advises the Romans, all in a body, to leave their city and seek a new seat in some remote part of the world, by way of cure for the corruption of their manners.

And then Swift, having thus cleared the way, proceeds to deal in order with certain plausible objections which he proposes (always ironically, observe) that he can imagine being raised in favour of the abolition in question. One great advantage of this, he has heard it alleged, would be that it would

enlarge and establish liberty of conscience—that great bulwark of our nation and of the Protestant religion, which is still too much limited by priestcraft, notwithstanding all the good intentions of the legislature, as we have lately found by a severe instance. For it is confidently reported that two young gentlemen of real hopes, bright wit, and profound judgment, who, upon a thorough examination of causes and effects, and by the mere force of their natural abilities, without

the least tincture of learning, having made a discovery that there was no God, and generously communicating their thoughts for the good of the public, were, some time ago, by an unparalleled severity, and upon I know not what obsolete law, broke for blasphemy. And as it has been wisely observed, if persecution once begins, no man alive knows how far it may reach or where it will end.

In answer to all which, with deference to wiser judgments, I think this rather shows the necessity of a nominal religion among us. Great wits love to be free with the highest objects; and if they cannot be allowed a God to revile or renounce, they will speak evil of dignities, abuse the government, and reflect upon the ministry, which, I am sure, few will deny to be of much more pernicious consequence, according to the saying of Tiberius, *deorum offensa diis curae.*

Again—

Another advantage proposed by the abolishing of Christianity is the clear gain of one day in seven, which is now entirely lost, and consequently the kingdom one-seventh less considerable in trade, business, and pleasure; beside the loss to the public of so many stately structures, now in the hands of the clergy, which might be converted into play-houses, market-houses, exchanges, common dormitories, and other public edifices.

I hope I shall be forgiven a hard word, if I call this a perfect *cavil.* I readily own there has been an old custom, time out of mind, for people to assemble in the churches every Sunday, and that shops are still frequently shut, in order, as it is conceived, to preserve the memory of that ancient practice; but how this can prove a hindrance to business or pleasure is hard to imagine. What if the men of pleasure are forced, one

day in the week, to game at home instead of the chocolate-houses? Are not the taverns and coffee-houses open? Can there be a more convenient season for taking a dose of physic? Is not that the chief day for traders to sum up the accounts of the week, and for lawyers to prepare their briefs? But I would fain know how it can be pretended that the churches are misapplied? Where are more appointments and rendezvouses for gallantry? where more care to appear in the foremost box, with greater advantage of dress? where more meetings for business? where more bargains driven of all sorts? and where so many conveniences or enticements to sleep?

And once more—

If Christianity were once abolished, how could the free-thinkers, the strong reasoners, and the men of profound learning, be able to find another subject, so calculated in all points whereon to display their abilities? what wonderful productions of wit should we be deprived of from those whose genius, by continual practice, has been wholly turned upon raillery and invectives against religion, and would therefore never be able to shine or distinguish themselves upon any other subject? we are daily complaining of the great decline of wit among us, and would we take away the greatest, perhaps the only, topic we have left? who would ever have suspected Asgil for a wit, or Toland for a philosopher, if the inexhaustible stock of Christianity had not been at hand to provide them with materials? what other subject, through all art and nature, could have produced Tindal for a profound author, or furnished him with readers? it is the wise choice of the subject that alone adorns and distinguishes the writer. For had a hundred such pens as these been employed on the side of religion,

they would have immediately sunk into silence and oblivion.

And it ends thus:

Upon the whole, if it shall still be thought for the benefit of Church and State that Christianity be abolished, I conceive, however, it may be more convenient to defer the execution to a time of peace, and not venture in this conjuncture to disoblige our allies who, as it falls out, are all Christians, and many of them by the prejudices of their education so bigoted as to place a sort of pride on the appellation. If upon being rejected by them we are to trust an alliance with the Turk, we shall find ourselves much deceived; for as he is too remote, and generally engaged in war with the Persian Emperor, so his people would be more scandalised at our infidelity than our Christian neighbours. For the Turks are not only strict observers of religious worship, but, what is worse, believe a God, which is more than is required of us, even while we preserve the name of Christians.

To conclude: whatever some may think of the great advantages to trade by this favourite scheme, I do very much apprehend that in six months' time after the act is passed for the extirpation of the Gospel, the North and East India stock may fall at least one per cent. And since that is fifty times more than ever the wisdom of our age thought fit to venture for the preservation of Christianity, there is no reason we should be at so great a loss, merely for the sake of destroying it.

Has intellectual scorn, we ask, ever been expressed with such consummate skill and effectiveness? Questions of how far it is just and justified, disappear in the intellectual exhilaration that such

writing is calculated to arouse. And again, it is a deep-rooted contempt of *man* that barbs and hurls this tremendous weapon. Yet as regards the ostensible object of his satire, Swift's very pride makes it certain that, in his own conscience at least, he was not exposing himself to the retort, "Who are you that you thus judge your own brethren?" We cannot doubt that he believed himself to have come into court (as it were) with clean hands. No one could cast back upon him the stone, that he did not believe the doctrines he officially preached, or that his daily conduct was inconsistent therewith. If pride *were* Swift's deadly sin, at least we learn something from it as to the non-existence of certain others. If the wits and coffee-house critics and men of fashion that he here scathes could have retorted upon him, they doubtless would. But it does not appear that any one cared to answer him. Perhaps they were afraid, and who, indeed, would willingly provoke a scorn so terrible, and weapons so incisive. Yet it was hardly a noble scorn—this misanthropic mood, in which is no balm, no hope, for the world. It is not even the scorn of a Timon—"Old Timon, with the noble heart, that strongly loathing, greatly broke." It strongly loathed—did the heart of Swift—but it never *broke*. Happier for him if it had!

Another production of Swift's, belonging to this period of his life, must receive but a passing comment, though to some tastes I can imagine

it proving more palatable than the foregoing. I mean the "Letter to a Young Clergyman lately entered into Holy Orders." It is, in truth, a piece of excellent advice and admirable good sense, addressed to some young friend, and, with a few notes and necessary alterations to adapt it to modern ways and fashions, would be an excellent manual to place in the hands of a young man similarly situated just now. It is full of sarcasm and irony of course. Swift could hardly have written otherwise, but its good sense is undeniable; and, if I may be allowed to say so, the dangers of popular pulpit oratory seem to have been much the same a hundred and fifty years ago as now. Swift notes the "frequent use of obscure terms" by preachers, "which, by the women, are called hard words, and by the better sort of vulgar, fine language, than which I do not know a more universal, inexcusable, and unnecessary mistake among the clergy of all distinctions, but especially the younger practitioners." He adds the *generally* safe observation that "a divine has nothing to say to the wisest congregation of any parish in this kingdom which he may not express in a manner to be understood by the meanest among them." He adds this exquisite remark, that "The fear of being thought pedants has been of pernicious consequence to young divines. This has wholly taken them off from their severer studies in the university, which they have exchanged for plays, poems, and pamphlets, in order to qualify them

for tea-tables and coffee-houses. This they usually call 'polite conversation, knowing the world, and reading men instead of books.'" He further warns his young friend against the use of slang and humorous anecdote in the pulpit, and against "endeavouring at wit in your sermons, because by the strictest computation, it is very near a million to one that you have none."

I have, in noticing this last admirable treatise, somewhat anticipated events as they affected Swift's career. Swift had been made Dean of St. Patrick's in 1713—which brought him back to Ireland, after a continuous stay in England from 1710 to 1713, during which time he had been absorbed in the party warfare into which his new adhesion to the Tories had plunged him. To this period accordingly belong the Examiner Papers, the pamphlet on the "Conduct of the Allies," and other noticeable works, which we, however, can only pass by in silence. But to this period also belongs, what far outweighs them in permanent and in human interest, the Letters, or rather the continuous Diary, which Swift regularly transmitted to his two friends, Esther Johnson and her inseparable, Mrs. Dingley. The "Journal to Stella," as it is commonly called, during these three years, is one of those invaluable contributions to our political and social history to which belong, for instance, *Pepys's Diary* and *Horace Walpole's Letters*, and it has the same value as these two last named, that it throws

a peculiar light, where light was much needed, upon the character and habits of the writer; only that, not quite like them, it raises for us the estimate we might otherwise have formed. For if from *Pepys* we learn a surprising deal of his "amiable weaknesses"; and if from *Walpole's Letters* we rise with a keener perception of his wit than of anything worthier, we come from those daily, unpremeditated, unedited outpourings of Swift's to feel that the *saeva indignatio* of the satirist, the misanthropy of his outlook, when dealing with humanity in the abstract, was not the *whole* Swift—perhaps not even the *real* Swift—and that at least we have the choice here as to which we shall conceive the real man to have been. We may bear in mind the bitter scorn, the deadly hatred of his kind, which is the "net" conclusion as to the author forced upon us by the perusal of *Gulliver*, for instance, and try to reconcile it with the kindness, the playful humour, the desire to give pleasure—to say nothing of the incidental revelations of Swift's good deeds to the sick and sorry, and his sympathy with all such, unfolded to us in these odd and petulant but charming pages. It is a curious and sad reflection how naturally, when two sides of a man are obvious to the world, the world will—not in malice necessarily—generally select the darker side as the true man, and the other side as the exception and the inconsistency: so difficult it seems to believe that the littlenesses, or the tempers,

or even the maladies of men, do not in their combination make up the whole of them. There is a tradition that Swift was never seen to smile. Yet this Diary is brimful of smiles—the smiles as of a mother or nurse playing with her child. For it is this obvious and unaffected attitude of Swift to Stella, as of a parent or schoolmaster to a pet child or pupil, that will be the first surprise, if I am not mistaken, to those who, having a vague general idea of the sad history that followed, first read this Journal. Swift was at the time forty-three, and Stella was about twenty-nine, and yet, whether by design or from old and inveterate habit, the earliest relation that bound the two, that of a young student to a little child he played with and taught to write and cipher, is the relation accentuated throughout. It may be assumed that by this time the question must have occurred both to Swift and to Stella, whether their close friendship, their strong mutual sympathy, was ever to ripen into something different; but from one end of the Journal to the other there is not a sentence, a phrase, an allusion, or word, that points in that direction. It is impossible to doubt the genuine affection that shines out among these daily jottings of public and private gossip, and the real devotion that made a very busy, and often invalided, man sit up at night, when sick and weary, to complete the day's record and not disappoint the two expectant ladies in Dublin; but of "lover's-talk," or of anything savouring of

it, there is none; there is abundance of prattle, but it is the prattle of the nursery. "The little language" which so pervades and colours the Journal is a recollection (so Swift admits) of those early days, when (like mother or fond nurse) he altered words and adopted pronunciations to assimilate the adult voice to the lisp and the imperfect utterance of the babe. "Do you know what?" (he writes) "when I am writing in our language, I make up my mouth just as if I was speaking it. I caught myself at it just now." And again and again, in his Journal, he "makes up his mouth" after this fashion, and spells his words accordingly. He calls himself "P d f r," which perhaps is the short for "Poor dear foolish rogue!"[1] and calls Stella and Dingley "M. D." (my dears); and writes "Pshaw, I must be writing to these dear brats every night, whether I will or no—let me have what business I will, or come home ever so late, or be ever so sleepy: but an old saying and a true one, 'Be you lords, or be you earls, you must write to naughty girls.'" Or he winds up his letter with, "So God Almighty protect poor dear, dear, dear, dearest M. D.," "and can Stella read this writing without hurting her dear eyes? Oh faith, I'm afraid not. Have a care of these eyes, pray, pray, pretty Stella." And so, in the general subject matter and topics of his Journal, it is what will amuse told in the most amusing

[1] [Or "father"; "foolish rogue" is unlikely because of the alternative spelling *Podefar*.]

way; his last pun, his last "bite," the last piece of stupidity of his servant Patrick; where he dined last night and how much the dinner cost; and whether my Lord Treasurer was in good humour; and "faith" he (Swift) won't stand these big men's tantrums any longer; or sometimes there is a graver piece of news—how Harley has been stabbed by a fanatical Frenchman; or how Duke Hamilton was killed in duel by Lord Mohun, and how Swift was the first to visit the poor Duchess, and stay and comfort her for two hours, for "I had loved the Duke well, and I think he loved me better." Full of light upon Swift's goodness of heart, his fidelity, his quick sense of pity, are these utterings; and if we would try to gauge him, outside these three years, it is here he must (I believe) be studied. If we knew him only by these confidences, we should surely close the Journal and say: how good a man is this, how neighbourly, how sympathetic, how true a friend, eccentric doubtless, and petulant and fond of mischief, but *sound in his humanities*. "I took Parnell this morning," he writes on January 14, 1712, "and we walked to see poor Harrison. I had the hundred pounds in my pocket. I told Parnell I was afraid to knock at the door; my mind misgave me. I did knock, and his man, in tears, told me that his master was dead an hour before. Think what grief this is to me! I went to his mother, and have been ordering things for his funeral with

as little cost as possible, to-morrow at ten at night. Lord Treasurer was much concerned when I told him. I could not dine with Lord Treasurer nor anywhere else, but got a bit of meat toward evening. No loss ever grieved me so much. Poor creature! Pray God Almighty bless you. Adieu! I send this away to-night, and I am sorry it must go while I am in so much grief!" Perhaps when we think of Swift at rest in his Cathedral of St. Patrick, beneath that terrible self-chosen epitaph: "Where fierce wrath can tear his heart no more," we may take some comfort from confessions such as this last, and wonder once more which was the *true* Swift after all!

And indeed Swift had need of all that was best in him to comfort, for troubles, not altogether of his own making, or at least fruits of thoughtlessness rather than of a bad heart, were crowding upon him. Among so much as there was to cheer and please poor Stella in this Journal, there were occasional entries which must have awakened uneasy fears, and given even a few bitter pangs, to one who was made of other stuff and had other hopes than Swift. While in London he had made the acquaintance of an estimable family, a widow lady and her children, of the name of Vanhomrigh. The eldest daughter's name—which by another freak of that irony of fate which dogged the steps of this master of earthly irony—was Esther; but she is better known to us by the playful name of *Vanessa*, which Swift coined for her. Swift was

constantly at the house. "Dined with Mrs. Vanhomrigh"—afterwards, with growing familiarity, "dined with Mrs. Van"—begins to appear oftener and oftener in the letters to Dublin. Swift's genius and versatility, and that unquestionable charm which, in women's eyes, outweighed all his sternness, peremptoriness, and eccentricity, made him the most welcome of visitors. Unknown, unsuspected, perhaps, by himself, Vanessa fell madly in love with him, and told him so. Swift professed astonishment—tried to laugh her out of her folly, ended by offering her his eternal friendship. But Vanessa was of a different temper, or patience, from her unknown rival in Ireland. When Swift was given the deanery of St. Patrick's, and their separation became inevitable, she conceived the bold idea of following him to Dublin. A sentence in the Journal was of gloomy omen for Stella:—"Mrs. Vanhomrigh's eldest daughter," Swift writes, "is come of age, and going to Ireland to look after her fortune, and get it into her own hands." It was indeed a fortune she was going to seek and never to find. One knows nothing in literary history so picturesque (if "the pity of it" did not kill its picturesqueness) as the history that was to follow; this stern, proud cynic—for such was his attitude towards the world—standing dumb and helpless, terrified at the spirits he himself had raised between beauty, wit, fidelity in the person of Stella—fortune, talent, adoration in that of Vanessa. No wonder

that Swift's life attracts the lover of romance above anything he has written. The wonders of Gulliver, of Laputa and Brobdingnag, pale before the fascination and the irony of this story of blighted loves.

For Swift, in my judgment, had never any intention of marrying either, or of marrying at all, and dreaded any approach on the part of either to the subject. A solution of one chief mystery in the situation is that Swift believed himself to be doomed in the end to insanity, and that he for that reason had resolved not to marry. I cannot accept this view. As to Swift's own expectations of losing his reason, we do know that he had suffered from his youth from an obscure malady, not of the brain itself, but in a region of the head bordering on the brain, which depressed him always and caused him at times much suffering. But there was no known insanity in his family, and therefore (even if *heredity* had been as popular a theme then as it is to-day) there was no need, I suppose, to anticipate that the taint of madness would descend to his posterity. There is one *locus classicus* on the subject. It is reported that one day in late life Swift observed to Young, the author of the *Night Thoughts*, pointing to a lofty tree, leafless and decayed in its upper branches, "I shall be like that tree; I shall die at the top." But to build a theory so large on so slight a foundation as this seems to me unsafe; and, apart from this, I cannot see the necessity of

the theory. Swift was not a marrying man—that at least is obvious—and his devotion to Stella at least was compounded, as is clear from every published communication with her, of the old affection of master and pupil—of true admiration for her character, and of intense enjoyment of her social and intellectual charm. For though, in company with only too many of her sex in those days, she never could *spell*—and Swift is always in the Journal rallying her in the playfullest way upon her deficiencies in this regard—yet she had wit, sense, and shrewdness, and her society was one of the few home-like pleasures this lonely man enjoyed. As to her wit, we all know that when she heard how beautifully Swift had written about her rival, Vanessa, she remarked that it was not strange, for every one knew he had written beautifully on a broom-stick—the allusion being to a well-known parody of Swift's on the style of Robert Boyle's meditations. Thackeray exclaims on this, "A woman! a true woman," which is not nice, for a man might equally have said it had the opportunity occurred to him, though perhaps Stella might appropriately have kept the thought to herself. But she did say (we also read) of an exceedingly tall young gentleman, who, she was informed, was "intended for the church," that she should have rather imagined he was "intended for the steeple," which gives one a notion of a young lady with a decided turn for repartee! But to the affection of a life-long companionship,

and to the admiration and sympathy of a congenial mind, was added, I believe, no other feeling on the part of Swift. He would not have exchanged the relation for any other. How far he was to blame for circumstances that so naturally encouraged a different hope on her part we cannot say or ever know.

There is a current belief, resting upon evidence, no doubt, considerable of its kind, but not, I think, absolutely conclusive, that Swift and Esther Johnson were privately married in the garden of the deanery by the Bishop of Clogher in the year 1716. The evidence for this marriage rests on the alleged communication of the secret by the Bishop to Berkeley, afterwards Bishop Berkeley, but at the time (1716) travelling abroad as tutor to the Bishop of Clogher's son. Neither of these prelates is known to have betrayed the confidence presumably reposed in them; the publication of the story is due, so it appeared, to the widow of Bishop Berkeley, who confided it to her grandson, George Monck Berkeley. This is the chief, almost the only evidence of importance, and it will be at once noticed through how many hands it had passed. It is evidence that cannot be tested. Walter Scott accepted it as sufficient; John Forster regarded it as not sufficient. All that we know is, that if such a ceremony was gone through, Stella and Mrs. Dingley returned at once to their old life, their "dual loneliness," and that the relations of Swift to the household re-

mained the same as before. It is idle to dogmatise upon what is long past decision. It may have been that they went through the form of a marriage at Stella's earnest request—for her own peace of mind, for her own self-respect, or, more likely, as a safeguard against the scandalous gossip, the "whispering tongues that poison truth," in the society of Dublin. Swift's appointment to the deanery of St. Patrick's in 1713 caused his return to Ireland, when any already existing difficulties and anomalies would be of course intensified; and the death of Queen Anne, with the accession of the Hanoverian dynasty and the fall of the Tory Ministry in the year following, set Swift free from old party activity, and fixed Ireland as henceforth his regular and abiding home.

Meantime the old friendship, the old pleasant intimacies and exchange of thoughts and intellectual sympathies went on as before. Each year, on Stella's birthday, she received those quite charming tributes in verse which place Swift among the best of writers of *vers de société*—so tender and playful, so ingenious and felicitous in thought, and, if the fact is to remain unchallenged that he was already privately married to her, so amazingly hard to understand, seeing how devoid they are of any awkwardness, any touch of self-consciousness in this inexplicable man. Take this, written in 1718:—

> Stella this day is thirty-four
> (We shan't dispute a year or more);

(this, by the way, is a daring compliment, for she was thirty-seven !)

> However, Stella, be not troubled
> Although thy size and years are doubled
> Since first I saw thee at sixteen,
> The brightest virgin on the green,
> So little is thy form declined,
> Made up so largely in thy mind.
> O would it please the gods to split
> Thy beauty, size and years and wit !
> No age could furnish out a pair
> Of nymphs so graceful, wise, and fair :
> With half the lustre of your eyes,
> With half your wit, your years, your size.
> And then, before it grew too late,
> How should I beg of gentle Fate
> That either nymph might have her swain,
> To split my worship, too, in twain.

Or take the verses that followed, two birthdays later, in 1720, which seems to me as perfect a thing of the kind as ever was penned :—

> All travellers at first incline
> Where'er they see the fairest sign ;
> And if they find the chambers neat,
> And like the liquor and the meat,
> Will call again, and recommend
> The Angel Inn to every friend.
> What though the painting grows decayed ?
> The house will never lose its trade ;
> Nay, though the treacherous tapster, Thomas,
> Hangs a new Angel two doors from us,
> As fine as dauber's hands can make it,
> In hopes that strangers may mistake it ;
> We think it both a shame and sin
> To quit the true old Angel Inn.

Now this is Stella's case, in fact,
An angel's face, a little crack'd ;
(Could poets or could painters fix
How angels look at thirty-six :)
This drew us in at first to find
In such a form an *angel's* mind ;
And every virtue now supplies
The fainting rays of Stella's eyes.
See at her *levee* crowding swains,
Whom Stella freely entertains
With breeding, humour, wit, and sense,
And puts them to but small expense ;
Their mind so plentifully fills,
And makes such reasonable bills,
So little gets for what she gives,
We really wonder how she lives !
And had her stock been less, no doubt
She must have long ago run out.
Then who can think will quit the place
When *Doll* hangs out a newer face ;
Or stop and light at *Chloe's* head,
With scraps and leavings to be fed ?
Then, Chloe, still go on to prate
Of thirty-six and thirty-eight ;
Pursue your trade of scandal-picking,
Your hints that Stella is no chicken ;
Your innuendos, when you tell us
That Stella loves to talk with fellows.
And let me warn you to believe
A truth for which your soul should grieve ;
That, should you live to see the day
When Stella's locks must all be gray,
When age must print a furrowed trace
On every feature of her face ;
Though you, and all your senseless tribe,
Could art, or time, or nature bribe
To make you look like beauty's queen
And hold for ever at fifteen,

> No bloom of youth can ever blind
> The cracks and wrinkles of your mind;
> All men of sense will pass your door,
> And crowd to Stella's at four-score.

Can we imagine anything more tenderly witty, more playfully loving, than this? And when we recall the acrid humour, the gigantic scorn, of Swift, when writing about men, do we not recall some words that speak of the same fountain sending forth sweet waters and bitter, and conclude that we are here in presence of an intellectual, if not a moral, "Dr. Jekyll," who has also his "Mr. Hyde"?

But sadder, darker events were not far off when these pretty lines were written. Vanessa was not far off; her mother was dead, the family fortunes crippled, and she had the reasonable excuse for coming to Ireland that her father had a property there, not far from Dublin. Swift had sought to laugh away *her* infatuation in the lines, admirable for skill and finesse, which he called "Cadenus and Vanessa"—"Cadenus" being, of course, an obvious anagram of "Decanus." The verses are, indeed, a kind of apology for both parties—for Vanessa having had the courage of her sentiments, and having taken the initiative usually restricted to leap year; and for him, Swift, who pleads that he could never have foreseen or imagined a young thing like that being captivated by an old fogy and politician like himself. But the verses healed

no broken hearts, and the unhappy Vanessa continued to nurse her passion and brood over her wrongs in this land of exile. Swift had never meant, or wished, to be her lover; she hardly even suggests, in those sad extant letters, that he had ever been other than a kind and indulgent friend. For years the friendship proceeded. Far better had it been even roughly and harshly terminated long before. But the end came at last. Vanessa had never, all those years, heard a word of the private marriage with Stella, if, indeed, it ever occurred, until at length (it was in the year 1723), according to the accepted tradition, though I do not know the exact value of the evidence on which it rests, Vanessa resolved on the step which was to bring matters to a crisis, and bring the curtain down on a "situation" as powerful as any that dramatist ever conceived. According to this story, Miss Vanhomrigh, weary of further suspense, addressed a letter to Stella asking her point blank what was the claim she had upon the society and friendship of Swift. According to the story, Stella replied at once that she was the Dean's wife, and sent on her rival's communication to Swift. Swift, in a fury of passion, rode over to Vanessa, flung a packet upon the table before her, and remounting his horse, rode back to Dublin. The packet contained her own letter to Stella. "It was her death warrant." In a few weeks she died—this is at least certain—the first victim of this mournful tragedy.

The story may be true, or it may not. It may be *in general outline* true, even if the marriage never took place. Stella may have let her rival know that if Swift ever were to marry, it could not, in common decency or for very pity, be any other than herself. But we do not know, and dare not dogmatise. As to apportioning blame or responsibility for this unhappy crisis, the difficulty is as absolute. Mr. Craik has told the story with excellent moderation and impartiality, and it is unlikely that we shall ever be brought nearer to the truth.

SWIFT—HIS LIFE AND GENIUS

III

THERE remain two-and-twenty years of Swift's life to be traced. Really much less than this, for the last years of all were to be but a living death. The Romance of his history (as that word is usually applied) ends with the climax which we reached last time—the death of Esther Vanhomrigh. The remainder of his working life is marked by political and literary enterprise, not by the conflicts of passion. He revisits England more than once, cementing the ties that bound him to his literary friends ; but when at home in Ireland, devoting himself with a kind of spitefulness of patriotism to Irish interests—to the country which he still and to the end felt as exile—says, in effect, "if I am to be banished here, I will espouse the cause of Ireland—right or wrong — through evil report and good against England." A notable opportunity for interfering, with effect, had been afforded by an incident of the year 1722, the year before Vanessa's death.

By a piece of jobbery on the part of the English Government, a patent had been granted to a Birmingham man, named William Wood, to manufacture a new copper coinage for Ireland. The general outline of the conditions became known. Wood was to be enriched, and a big bribe to be paid by him for interest at court. The greatest excitement was produced in Ireland, and Swift, under a happy *alias*, placed himself in the forefront of the opposition to the scheme. In the character of one "M. B., Drapier (*i.e.* Draper) of Dublin," he published in 1723, and the following year, a series of letters pointing out the disastrous effects upon Irish trade and prosperity of the new and debased coinage, and this in an assumed style, both of argument and phraseology, such as would appear appropriate in the mouth of the class represented. I have been obliged in these lectures to neglect almost entirely what is yet a most important side of Swift's genius, his contributions to political and party discussion; but the Draper's Letters have a literary interest, apart from their political. They show, as many other things show—as his *Gulliver* shows, as several of his humorous poems show—that Swift had a *dramatic* faculty, at least as regards characterisation, of a rare quality. It was the masterly presentment to the lower middle class of Ireland of the kind of arguments and persuasion current among themselves, of the kind which would most surely "come home to their business

and bosoms," that, quite as much as the inherent force of those arguments, delighted and stimulated the Irish people. As we read them—no longer in the turmoil of the struggle—we feel that they were exactly what was wanted for the purpose in view. They are hardly to us persuasive: we see that there is special pleading throughout; that there is no pretence of fairness; that the consequences to Irish trade of the proposed influx of coppers are frankly exaggerated; and feel once more that this "demonic" power of Swift's could do pretty much what it liked, and could at any time, if it chose, make the worse appear the better reason, or at least could, like the undergraduate I mentioned the other day, write "quite as good a one on the other side." But it is, apart from all this—and if we can remember that we are watching a consummate actor—an intellectual treat to read these letters, so skilful and so lifelike. Swift "masquerading" as a Dublin tradesman, just as a few years later he was to masquerade as a Rotherhithe sea-captain. The excitement caused by the letters, the entire success of their purpose, and the total defeat of the scheme—these are part of Irish history of the last century, and may be read in Mr. Lecky's great work and elsewhere. For us, now, the interest lies in the versatile genius, and, I fear we must say, the versatile conscience of Swift.

This versatility of genius, this range of interest, and this literary activity during those years of

Swift's decline, is one of the most extraordinary sights in literary history. Our necessary omission of his purely political writings may have made it less clear how that splendid brain must have been overworked; how the merely intellectual tension of his life, under circumstances of feeble health and personal sorrows and mortifications, may have had something to do with the breakdown which came at last, quite as much as any one weak point in the anatomy of the brain or ear. The amount of writing he continued to produce was amazing. Even of his purely literary matter, as distinguished from political, I am only able to touch upon a small part, and it is not till we face his work as a whole—essays, satires, treatises, sermons, verses, squibs, besides journals and letters to his literary friends—that we form some idea of the labour undergone. Meantime while much was still to come, the final blow—taking from him the companionship which remained as the one sweetener of his life—fell upon the unhappy man. *Gulliver's Travels*—of which more hereafter—had appeared late in 1726; in 1727, during what proved to be Swift's last visit to England, he was recalled by Stella's failing health. She was living still, as from the first day of her arrival in Ireland, in the house and under the care of her friend, except during Swift's absence from Ireland, when it seems they occupied the deanery. She suffered from asthma or some kindred affection, and had been long failing. A month before her death she

made a will, in the name (be it remarked) of "Esther Johnson, spinster," leaving her fortune, for life, to her mother and sister, and afterwards for charitable uses; she left Swift certain papers, and made him trustee as regarded a legacy for a cousin of his. As to the title she bore in the will, her maiden name, no particular argument can be based on it. If she had actually been Swift's wife, as a married woman in those days could not make a will at all, the will was null and void. But the marriage, if any, was known but to two or three persons; there was no one to contest the will, and it was obviously carried into effect.

There are traditions utterly unverifiable, and in themselves of little value, as to interviews at the end between Swift and Stella, in which the latter urged Swift to publish the fact of their marriage to the world. Whatever passed between them on the subject, most certainly Swift never did publish such fact; and the singular, and most deeply touching sketch of her character and history, which he began to write on the very night of her death, and continued to add to from day to day till finished, is in curious want of harmony with any such passages. I read a few lines in my first lecture from this singular document; it is published in all complete editions of Swift. It opens: "This day being Sunday, 28th January 1727-28, about eight o'clock at night, a servant brought me a note,

with an account of the truest, most virtuous, and valuable friend that I, or perhaps any other person, was ever blessed with. She expired about six in the evening of this day; and as soon as I am left alone, which is about eleven at night, I resolve for my own satisfaction to say something of her life and character." And then he proceeds, with a calmness more terrible than any accent of despair, to give a summary of her story, even with dates and statistics as to her fortune: how he had first known her, how she came to settle in Ireland, what gifts of nature she had received, and how she had improved them by reading and conversation; how good her judgment was, how all sorts and conditions of men delighted in her society, how well-bred and modest she was, how libertines and loose talkers were hushed into propriety by her very look, how her servants adored her, and how, like Steele's Lady Elizabeth Hastings, to love her was a liberal education. Then comes a break. "Jan. 29. My head aches, and I can write no more," and then Tuesday, Jan. 30: "This is the night of the funeral, which my sickness will not allow me to attend. It is now nine at night, and I am removed into another apartment, that I may not see the light in the church, which is just over against the window of my bed-chamber." And from this he passes on, without modulation, to resume his description of her mental and moral excellences, with anecdotes of her personal courage; but there is no trace of emotion, still less of

remorse, or regret for a past which might have been so different; not a word betrays the bitterness that must have been his. He was ashamed, unhappily for himself, of the common wants and affections, the common griefs and consolations of common men! And indeed, within a few months before Stella died, Swift had given to the world that masterpiece, which more than anything he had yet written, placed him in manifest antagonism to his race, and marked him as the implacable scorner of his kind. How the scheme and machinery of *Gulliver's Travels* originated and matured we cannot say, but it seems to have been one outcome of Swift's association in London with Pope and Arbuthnot and the other members of the "Scriblerus Club," an amiable combination for general satire of human follies and eccentricities. The main plan was likely enough to have been suggested by the great success of *Robinson Crusoe*, a few years before, which would have revived interest in the marvels of foreign peoples, and given perhaps new vogue to the old travellers' tales of "Anthropophagi, and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders." But the main plan being chosen, how was he to make it subserve his intense desire to affront the human race? For this, as he admitted to his friend Pope, was his leading object and desire. "I suppose he thought it would annoy *somebody*," was Samuel Johnson's shrewd interpretation of a certain line in Pope, and it was to annoy *everybody* that Swift wrote

Gulliver. And his method was doubtless gigantic and tremendous—*demonic*, to use a word I have used before. It was not to satirise some imaginary people—the Lilliputians or the Brobdingnagians—that he arranged his scheme; but through *their* eyes and judgments, and superior sense, to satirise the England of whom Gulliver was a native and son. It is a device of which in satire and in allegory use has been often made since, this ridicule of our morality or our customs, by placing the ridicule in the mouth of a creature from another country or sphere; but it was a comparative novelty to Swift's contemporaries.

This book, *Gulliver's Travels*, is the one work of Swift's which is known to the universal reading public, I suppose, in all European countries. It is in every way his greatest and most characteristic work. Swift's purely intellectual gifts are there in perfection; his vigour, clearness, and ease of style; invention of the first order; wit and humour of the most exquisite. We read it in an abridged form as children; for its marvels, and for the verisimilitude which makes them seem possible, if not wholly credible, and for the Defoe-like handling of detail, which makes it so like what a man would have written had he had such adventures as Gulliver. "We are not surprised at the Irish bishop who pronounced it most interesting, but added there were things in it which he could hardly believe." Then, as we grow older, our eyes are opened to the pungent satire scattered

through the narrative, upon the trivial or foolish quarrels of men or nations, on the pomps and vanities which men will live and die for ; the wars of the " Big-endians " and the " Little-endians," of which, with amazing gravity (and this gravity is a special feature of Swift's irony), the author relates that " it is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end." We become aware what is meant by the strips of blue and red ribbon for which prominent men at court would contend by jumping over sticks ; and it is not till last of all, the sublime audacity of the whole purpose flashes upon the reader. For, besides the incidental satire upon particular blemishes and weaknesses in any one particular state of society, such as that among which Swift dwelt, Swift, by the machinery of his allegory, was able to inflict a deeper, wider wound upon the credit of human nature. He wielded a two-edged sword—a two-handed engine. For the Lilliputians and Brobdingnagians were *men*, though on vaster or more diminutive scale than ordinary ; and Swift thereby contrives, without showing that he had any such intention, to show human nature as contemptible when exhibited in the manikins of Lilliput, and gross, horrible, and revolting when magnified into the size of the Brobdingnagian. Samuel Gulliver, from this point of view, is the author himself, looking from a height of calm contemplation, alternately on the

pettiness and on the grossness of human vanities or pursuits. And this is what, of course, makes *Gulliver* Swift's most characteristic, most representative work, and places it in a different category from that earlier satire, the *Tale of a Tub.* Taking up that book once in the years of his decay, he was heard to exclaim, "What a genius I had when I wrote that book!" But, brilliant as it is, it is not Swift's masterpiece. There was underlying it—for those who had eyes to see—the scorn for his kind, the grudge and the impeachment of human nature. It was then in the germ, as we have seen, but though the book was profane enough, Swift had not conceived the more profane, the more awful idea, of cursing the very image of his Maker, and hooting and yelling at the flesh and blood which he, the author, was himself compelled to wear. And *Gulliver* belongs, as we see, to Swift's matured powers, if not matured judgment, and the years which should have brought the philosophic mind, but which had brought him only a deadlier hate and scorn. *Gulliver* is the key to Swift's life and works. Swift, writing about human nature, is always either in Lilliput or in Brobdingnag—either pitying and scorning its littleness, or enlarging and dilating on its horror. Yet no one who has watched, in friend and neighbour, or in himself, the manifold inconsistencies which make up the individual life will be surprised that the man who thus looked upon his kind was at the same time capable of affection and admiration

for individuals. Swift could love Arbuthnot and Gay and Addison, while he affected to loathe the clay out of which they were formed. Yes, and worse than this, he could be drawn to, and dearly love, the converse and the sympathy of women like Stella and Vanessa, and be aware at the same time that, in accordance with this creed, he was bound to loathe and despise them; yes, and to loathe and despise himself for not being superior to the vulgar affections and needs of mankind. And here may well have been a clue to some portion of his conduct, and to certain elements of his misery. His heart and his creed were in deadly conflict. His heart pleaded with him to be human; his creed said, "to be human is to be despicable or brutal." When he looked on Stella, his heart may have often said, "take her, and be happy"; his creed said, "no, wedded love is also a delusion and a snare." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in familiar lines, has told us that "to be wrath with one we love, doth work like madness in the brain." But what is even that struggle between love and anger to compare with this conflict of love and scorn, this self-imposed obligation of disgust and revolt. "I have just beheld," said the Archbishop of Dublin to a friend, after an interview with Swift, "the most miserable man in the world"; and one thinks he must have deserved this description, as truly as any man that ever lived.

Of *Gulliver* the world at large knows chiefly

the portions referring to Lilliput and Brobdingnag. It is these only, and then only with careful editings, that one cares to leave about in the schoolroom. The other portions are most surely not "meat for babes"; not because of immorality, or even of coarseness, as ordinarily understood, but because of the horror of the continuous presentation of human nature in every light that can lower it and make it hateful. To compare it unfavourably with the lower animals—such as that indeed noble animal "the horse"—to exaggerate the *animal* aspect of the man, and minimise the spiritual, by ignoring, not only the soul, but *any* sense of dignity and self-respect in the creature—this is the ignoble work Swift set himself to do. And the disastrous character of his method lies in its very skill and adroitness. Here is no Thersites, scattering abuse and ribaldry right and left, but a man, standing a head and shoulders, in cleverness and plausibility, above his contemporaries; employing this ability to sow broadcast the seeds of misanthropy; for though the satire is ostensibly directed against Swift's own country, by making the criticisms of it proceed from a kind of "Utopia," the censure passed is not on this or that country at all, but on the human subject.

It is a relief to turn from this intellectually exhilarating but morally depressing work to some of that lighter and wholesomer fare which Swift was to provide for the world in the few years that

remained to him, when his great intellect was unimpaired. In 1731 he wrote to his friend Gay that he had two great works in hand — one addressed to the domestic servants of England, the other to their masters and mistresses. But the subjects here are but accidentally to be so described. It was no treatise on servants' duties to their masters, and *vice versa*. The former tract, the *Directions to Servants*, is a piece of sarcasm less creditable to Swift than most of such effusions of his, because it was addressed to a class who were least likely of all to appreciate irony, or be shamed by it into decency. The work is simply a string of comical suggestions to the cook, the groom, the valet—how to avoid doing their duty by their employer, how to do everything they should not, and avoid doing everything they should. And the humour of this is obtained by the minute knowledge the author shows of every sordid detail of each practitioner's office. It is the very spleen of cynicism : pitiless and ignoble, and without any indirect possibility of raising any one's moral tone, or inciting anything but the merriment that makes men more callous. For "satire" at its best exercises but feeble powers of discipline, and cynicism even less. The other of the two treatises mentioned is as different as possible, and exhibits as well as any antithesis could do, the singular versatility of Swift's powers, and even of his moral temper. This work, as he told Gay, was designed "to reduce the whole politeness, wit,

humour, and style of England into a short system for the use of all persons of quality, and particularly of all maids of honour." This is the *jeu d'esprit*, of course, which we know as Swift's *Polite Conversations*, and which probably shares with *Gulliver* the distinction of being more generally known than all other of its author's productions. It is, indeed, the most genial, humorous, and justifiable of all Swift's satires, and is readable from first to last, including the admirable introduction, in which the supposititious author, Mr. Simon Wagstaff, propounds and describes his scheme, which is no less than that of teaching the *beau monde* the art of conversation by a series of examples and illustrations, deduced from actual conversations which the author had heard and made notes of during a long term of years. The whole thing, I need not say, is a satire upon the silliness, the vapidity, the slang that does duty for wit, the rudeness that does duty for repartee, and the moral truisms that answer the purpose of thought in the smart society of that day, and indeed of every day, for this is what makes the perennial interest to us of these conversations. Everything else has changed in these hundred and fifty years since, all forms, that is to say, have changed, but the essence remains the same. The particular forms of repartee, and of coarseness, and of rudeness, and of jest have all passed away; but the things are still with us, only clothed in their new dress. If we wish to verify this con-

clusion, we should put side by side with Swift's Persons of Quality those depicted in some lifelike novel of our own day, say, for example, that delectable romance which you have all been reading, called *Dodo*. There is indeed little surface resemblance between the persons there portrayed and Swift's famous company; but look a little below the surface, and, I repeat, the absolute identity of substance is truly appalling. It is true that we have deteriorated in some marked ways since Swift's time. We are not as coarse or unrefined in the things we say as some of his interlocutors, but we are far more unsound at bottom, quite as rude under the guise of repartee, and quite as foolish. Tom Neverout and Miss Notable exchange jests as broad as Benedick and Beatrice a hundred years before them, but there is no sign that they regard the ordinary bands of society as relaxable at will; and Lady Smart does not offer to run away with Mr. Tom Neverout.

However, Swift's object, as he makes clear, is not to touch ethical questions save on the very surface, but to ridicule the absence of anything like "originality" in the so-called conversation of good society in his time. It seems to me that even good critics have strangely gone wrong in trying to settle the question how far Swift meant these conversations to be a fair average picture of what then was heard in dining- and drawing-rooms, in the Park or the Mall. The way he makes his point and drives home the ridicule is not by photo-

graphing, or rather *telephoning* actual conversations, but by carefully accumulating all the stock conventional jests and repartees current in that society, and then framing his conversations wholly out of these, omitting even the thinner and more tasteless *batter* in which these plums were usually found served up. In his introduction Mr. Wagstaff apologises for many of the sayings attributed to his *dramatis personæ* having the look of Proverbs, and indeed many of them, having been long in use, had even then acquired a quasi-proverbial character. I well remember when I first read these conversations being surprised and delighted to find there a number of sayings or retorts which I had heard first from my nurse. When, with infantile frankness, we asked our nurse how old she was, she used to reply, "As old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth," and this is the very repartee put into Miss Notable's mouth when the same injudicious question is addressed to her. But there were any number of others equally familiar, and it showed, what indeed is matter of common experience, that fashions, not only in dress, descend from the parlour to the kitchen, or ascend to the nursery. Pronunciations, I need not say, travel the same route. Our grandfathers used to say "the-ayter," where we say "theatre"; Rogers used to say that "balcony" instead of "balcōny" made him sick; and I myself knew an old lady who in her youth had mixed in the best of company, and who refused to say anything but

"cowcumber" to the last day of her life. And so with "slang," for the drawing-room has its slang as well as the music-hall — that which is not invented by the speaker, but is used by him, just because others have said it before—each generation has its own, and it does duty for wit. And as to repartee, it is astonishing how easy it is to be brilliant, if the rules of the game allow you to be insulting; and it is in these respects that Swift's smart people anticipate the certain smart people of to-day. But the charm of Swift's handling of the subject is that here for once in a way, where there is such opportunity for bitterness, his humour is not bitter, but sweet and wholesome, and we part from Tom Neverout and Miss Notable and the rest with quite a pleasant taste in one's mouth. For their talk may be vapid, and their raillery very second-hand, but it breaks no bones and hurts no feelings.

To this period, between the death of Stella and his own entire breakdown in health, belongs also much of the most deservedly admired of Swift's humorous verse. Swift had this faculty of easy verse in all sorts of metres, but notably in the eight-syllabled rhymed couplet, from his earliest age; and, as with his prose, turned it at times to very sordid uses, but at its sanest, it is very excellent reading, and neither Butler before him, nor Thomas Ingoldsby after him, wrote in it with more humour, or greater copiousness and sense of ease. Early in life he had retold in this favourite metre

Ovid's beautiful legend of *Baucis and Philemon*, transforming Jupiter and Mercury into two Catholic saints, endowed with miraculous powers, and the old couple from Asia Minor into two Irish cottagers. Mr. Craik includes this in his selection; and it is good to read Swift where his grudges against mankind have been for the time wholly forgotten, and when he was indulging a kindly and tender humour, which was perhaps the most real, as well as the better side of him. But these verses have another interest as exhibiting Swift's power of dramatic characterisation, which we have noticed both in the *Drapier's Letters* and in *Gulliver*. In the development of the English novel, which was in the closing years of Swift's life to take its first definite shape in the *Pamela* of Richardson, and the *Joseph Andrews* of Fielding, Swift contributed certain elements, though it would be idle to assert that he ever had in him the germs of either novelist or dramatist, for a vast deal more goes to make either one or the other, besides the gift, essential as it is, of conceiving character. But as the sketches of Addison and Steele in the *Spectator*, Sir Roger de Coverley and the like, are justly held to be a kind of foretaste of the novel, a glimpse of what the world was later to enjoy in Squire Western and My Uncle Toby, so Swift's anticipations of the same happy gift are not to be denied him, or passed by without acknowledgment; and one character at least—in a poem I am to speak of—it is well

known, suggested to Fielding, or was even borrowed by him for, the character of the Ensign Northerton in *Tom Jones*. The poem, if we may call it so for convenience, to which I refer is that entitled "The Grand Question debated, whether Hamilton's Bawn should be turned into a Barrack or a Malt-house." Swift paid a visit of some months to his friend Sir Arthur Acheson at Market Hill, in Ireland, in 1728; and while there must have heard this important question under discussion, whether some farm-buildings on Sir Arthur's estate should be let to the Government of the day for a barrack, or should be converted into a malting establishment. The barrack scheme, if carried out, would obviously bring some new and lively society into what was presumably a rather dull neighbourhood, and we can imagine that Lady Acheson and her lady's-maid both ardently desired that this alternative should be the one chosen. In any case, Swift chose the incident to treat in verse, full of good humour and excellent perception of character. Mr. Craik had not space, I suppose, to include it in his selection, but you will find it with other pieces of Swift's in Mr. Frederick Locker's *Lyra Elegantiarum*. (The word "Bawn," by the way, has some Irish history wrapped up in it. A Bawn was originally an entrenched or fortified settlement, which the Ulster colonists made for themselves for farming purposes, but also for defence against the recalcitrant natives; and this piece of property of

Sir Arthur's retained the name, doubtless, of its earliest tenant.) Another, no less admirable, sketch of the language and modes of thought of the Servants' Hall is shown in some lines, written at a very early period in Swift's career, when he was acting as chaplain at Dublin Castle. An incident of that time, in which the old housekeeper had had her pocket picked, is treated with no less insight and dramatic effectiveness.

But I must pass on to some verses, no longer dramatic, but autobiographical, in which towards the close of his working life Swift attempted an estimate of his own gifts and services to his time, taking advantage also of the opportunity, so dear to him, of having his fling at the society of the day. I mean the "Lines on the Death of Dr. Swift," which he wrote in the year 1731. I cited a few lines in my first lecture to illustrate how delicately and tenderly Swift could write when those he really loved and valued were in question; how he could pretend jealousy of Pope, and Gay, and Arbuthnot, only in order to pay them the subtlest compliment. But this is but a digression in the poem. The tone otherwise is purely satirical—on the heartless and careless summer friends who begin to criticise him, and remember his faults, as soon as ever he has passed away. Rochefoucauld's often-quoted maxim as to the "misfortunes of our best friends" is the text on which he preaches. The satire towards the close is in a higher and more serious strain, pleading for

some recognition of his services to Ireland. And it ends with the lines best known, perhaps, and oftenest quoted of all:

> He gave the little wealth he had
> To build a house for fools and mad,
> And showed by one satiric touch
> No nation wanted it so much.

This, you know, states a fact; for thus did Swift appropriate a great part of the fortune he had to leave. It will often, I daresay, have been accepted as a piece of additional evidence that Swift anticipated insanity as his own final lot; that the malady he felt to be his own special destiny should have awakened in him a special sympathy for others afflicted in like manner. But I think his own explanation here is far more probable. A satirist so unrelenting as Swift may well have wished to perpetuate a sarcasm, even by the very terms of his will. A man who could ordain the words *saeva indignatio* to be read for ever above his mortal remains would hardly have shrunk from converting a legacy into a perennial libel on his countrymen. This remarkable poem, full of wit and power as it is, should not blind us to the light it throws upon Swift's inherent personality. For any, the greatest of men, to celebrate his own death, and ante-date the adverse criticisms that may then be passed on him, is a piece of audacious, however brilliant cleverness; but none the less is it a sign of an

enormous "egotism"—a quality not perhaps identical with pride, but near akin to it. And it was the combination of the two that is the key to much of Swift's temper in his treatment of individual men and women—and not less so in his treatment of men at large. Shakspeare has shown us, in many profound creations, how the inordinate development of some moral passion—jealousy, scorn, the despotic habit—may grow and overrule the whole nature, until the brain itself ceases to control.

And now, after a few more verses (including the fine "Rhapsody on Poetry"), Swift's work for good or ill was done. The softening of the brain —or whatever was the exact physical change in its structure—or the increasing pressure on it from without, was so far advanced that, in 1741, a guardian was appointed for Swift by the Court of Chancery. In 1740 he had written, "I am sure my days will be few; few and miserable they must be"; but he lingered five years longer, and after two final years of helpless idiocy, he was released from that "long disease," his life, on the 19th of October 1745. Well might Samuel Johnson, in his "Vanity of Human Wishes," cite Swift's decay as a warning to those who desire length of days:

> From Marlborough's eyes see tears of dotage flow,
> And Swift expire, a driveller and a show!

I am aware that I have presented but a *maimed*

portrait of Swift, because, from considerations of time and space, I have omitted his public life almost altogether, and his public life, his influence on affairs and on men of his time, was considerable and important. I have preferred to dwell upon the man, and on his literary work, so far as it was creative and imaginative, and to study with you, in this limited time, the relation of the one to the other, and their mutual influence. Of all the great names in English literature, Swift stands most conspicuously *alone*, and this loneliness has had the effect of perhaps warning many persons off from any study of him at all. He had his friends—who loved him, and whom he loved. He belongs to a memorable group in a memorable age—a group of humourists and satirists, Pope and Steele and Addison and the rest—but we feel somehow as if he was among them, but not of them. Even when he is associating with them, planning satire and jest and *jeu d'esprit*, he stands apart. When we recall the greatest of all names in our literature—when we think of the great masters of imagination—of Chaucer, of Shakspeare, of Milton, of their sweetness and universality—we feel that they too stand alone in their greatness, and yet that they are *not* alone, because their humanity is sound, because they have not lost or ignored their sense of relationship with their kind. But when we turn to Swift—great as he is in power and versatility—we recognise a loneliness, but a

loneliness of his own creating. It is noticed by his biographers that he seems to have known and studied Milton (there exists, I believe, a copy of *Paradise Lost* annotated by the Dean himself for the use of Stella), but that there are few signs, beyond an occasionally borrowed phrase, of his familiarity with our greatest dramatist; and that when the Dean's library was sold it contained no copy of Shakspeare's plays. One can understand an interest in Milton being felt by the gloomy Dean, unlike in all points as the men were. The pulpit-like isolation of the Puritan poet would command his respect. And in the hero of the great epic (for Satan is the real hero), in the picture of one who was intellectual without responsibility, and who preferred to reign in hell rather than serve in heaven, Swift might well have recognised a certain counterpart of the lot which he had chosen for himself. But in the "azure eyes, with a surprising archness" we can fancy were Shakspeare's as well as Swift's, we read no reflection of himself. Not that Swift had not the dramatic instinct—for we have seen that he had. He could understand and reproduce with happiest success the Dublin shopkeepers, or Hannah the lady's-maid; but of the Shakspearian width of sympathy, of the serenity which shines out from the Shakspearian page, of this he knew nothing, for he had cut himself off from it.

And yet there were seasons in which he had serene thoughts, and even deep and illuminating

ones. Among Swift's miscellaneous writings will be found a collection of his detached thoughts or apophthegms, reflecting, in their variety, his many-sided and inconsistent nature. *There* will be found sweetness and bitterness; the great thoughts that come from the heart, and expressions of mere worldly shrewdness, lying, as in himself, without arrangement, side by side. "Although men are accused for not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps as few know their own strength." "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another." "Very few men, properly speaking, live at present, but are providing to live another time." "An *excuse* is worse and more subtle than a *lie*, for an excuse is a lie *guarded*." "Amusement is the happiness of those who cannot think." There is depth here, and seriousness of moral conviction—an insight into the heart of things worthy of an Augustine, we almost say, or a Pascal. Then we light upon a vein reminding one of the incisive observations of a Bacon. "Atheists put on a false courage and alacrity in the midst of their darkness and apprehensions, like children who, when they go in the dark, sing for fear." "Poetry is the madness of many for the gain of the few." Elsewhere we find the wit supreme—blazing out, and all but hiding the wisdom it shines round. "The reason why so few marriages are happy is that young ladies spend their time in making *nets* instead of making cages." Or this: "Praise is like amber-

gris—a little whiff of it, and by snatches is very agreeable; but when a man holds a whole lump of it to your nose it strikes you down." And, lastly, we find the old leaven of misanthropy and pessimism represented in such a parody as this on the opening sentence of the Church's Liturgy: "When a man becomes virtuous in his old age he is but making a sacrifice to God of the devil's leavings." Or this, most characteristic of all, and at the root, as I have tried to show, of most that he wrote and suffered: "It seems most reasonable to love God and to despise man, so far as we are able to understand either." And what right, you indignantly ask, had Swift to despise mankind? Was there any secret cause, any mystery of his constitution, of his brain's development, that accounts for it, or palliates it? Well, every man is a mystery to every other; and cynicism is of many origins and many sorts. A Timon turns cynic because he is a weak man expecting a gratitude which he does not find. An Iago is a cynic because he is a base man and believes all others base. A Jaques is a cynic because it is fine to pose as one; he makes capital out of it, and hopes to get credit for it—a species quite familiar in our own day. Swift's was none of these; it was grounded upon the observation of a particular society, which, indeed, was dissolute, profane, and corrupt, to a degree which justified any prophet in denouncing it. But Swift was no such prophet. The essential

mark of the prophet was wanting in him—the enthusiasm for morality. He is rarely, if ever, eloquent for goodness; he only comes near eloquence in lashing its opposite. He saw that "man, proud man, dressed in a little brief authority," was yet (how often!) a petty and ignoble creature, and he resolved to trample on that pride; but it was, like Diogenes of old, with a still greater pride. And thus he even stood in life-long fear of the miserable creature he was always expressing contempt for. It is apparent throughout his life that he was so afraid of men's opinions—so afraid of being called "hypocrite"—that he often kept out of sight and in the dark the more generous or devout promptings of his spirit. And, moreover, unhappily for himself, he closed his ears to the nobler voices and his eyes to the nobler spectacles of humanity. It is possible to do this. Just as by a marvellous mechanism of will acting on brain we can so concentrate our bodily ear upon some one particular sound (upon one particular instrument, let us say, in an orchestra) that it alone lives with us, while all the rest retreat into distance, so we may see only what we wish to see, and hear only what we wish to hear; and if we keep our inward eye fixed only on the "seamy side of life," we shall only demoralise ourselves in the process; our attitude towards it will not be that of the "weeping angel," but, as Swift's too often was, that of the "angry ape."

The tigre-singe—ape and tiger—both were

represented in his nature. But the angel was not always absent either; the tiger was not always without its lamb-like moments; there was much and bitter struggle for the mastery; and in consideration of the misery it wrought we may turn, not without pity, from the contemplation of so much power and so much suffering.

SOME LEADERS IN THE POETIC REVIVAL OF 1760–1820

I

COWPER

1731–1800

THE poet William Cowper is perhaps to many persons, *prima facie*, a very unattractive name. It is as true of some poetic reputations as of men's moral character, that the evil that they do "lives after them," and that their good is "oft interred with their bones." Not that the good and gentle Cowper left anything "bad" in his poems; but the reputation for whatever in these days is unpopular in poetry, such as the didactic element, or the pietistic moralising, an occasional "jigginess" in his verse, through the use of metres now passed out of fashion, has clung to Cowper; and it is astonishing how easily a poet's reputation is determined for him by what is weakest and poorest in his verse. And yet all the while Cowper, so far from being a pietistic

recluse, was one of the most cultivated men of his day, one of the most perfect gentlemen, one of the finest humourists. And all these qualities are reflected in his verse. Doubtless he was not reckoned at his truest value, even in his own day. Because so much of his verse was prompted, and, even when not prompted, coloured, by his fervent Calvinistic theology, he came to be regarded as the poet of a school of religious thought; and because men of that school naturally clung to him and were proud of him, the more purely literary critics of the day valued him lightly. The poet admired by the Philistines (it was argued) must be essentially Philistine himself. And this reputation has steadily attached to Cowper. Because our grandmothers and great-aunts and other uncritical persons learned him by heart and copied him into their manuscript books, it might seem to us that he is essentially of another day and another creed, and therefore obsolete, with no message, and therefore no source of pleasure for ourselves. We recall his hymns, his pleasant and fluent fables, his "Lines on his Mother's Picture," and his miniature ode on the "British Warrior Queen bleeding from the Roman Rods," and "*there* (we imagine and say) is the once popular minor poet William Cowper!"

But William Cowper was very different from a minor poet of our day; and if anything were wanted to prove this it would be that he was *fifty years of age* before he rushed into print!

Born in 1731, Cowper was absolutely unknown as a poet, beyond the small circle of his intimate friends, when, about the year 1780, his faithful friend Mrs. Unwin suggested, as a distraction from the religious melancholy which had become habitual, that he should undertake some sustained poetic effort. She suggested as a topic the *Progress of Error*, to be treated in the form of a "moral satire." The idea pleased Cowper: he set to work, and it developed under his hand. It grew and grew. The other once well-known but now forgotten satires, "Truth," "Table Talk," "Hope," "Charity," and the rest followed, and constituted his first volume of poems, published in 1782.

Now, I am not going to trouble you with a connected story of Cowper's life. Most of us who could ill pass an examination in his poetry are familiar with the course of that sad and deeply interesting history. Cowper is one of those English classics who is known to us as a *personality* quite as intimately as by his writings. He stands, in this respect, on a par with Johnson, Goldsmith, Scott, and Charles Lamb. In all these cases the author's struggles or sorrows have had much to do with engendering that pity which is "akin to love." And Cowper in this respect, like Charles Lamb, though in every other so different, put much of himself into what he wrote. Also, like Lamb, he has left us some of the most charming letters in our language.

Cowper is a classic; and by that we mean, or should mean, that he has *individuality*—that he was not the mere follower of a fashion or a mood belonging to the age in which he lived. Looking back at his poetry, over the space of a hundred years, we see him standing separate and apart from the lesser versifiers who then, as now, were plentiful as blackberries. Or, rather, we have no occasion to distinguish him from them, because, as a matter of fact, for us those lesser lights have already ceased to be. Time passes these lesser objects through his mighty and beneficent sieve, and leaves behind the greater ones alone! But though Cowper had "individuality," that word does not imply that he sprang full-equipped into the world, like Minerva from the brain of Jupiter. He sprang, like all poets, all creative artists, from the brains of many other men. Shakspeare started from Greene and Lyly and Marlowe; Milton from Spenser and the Fletchers; Pope from Dryden; Thomson from Milton; Wordsworth from Burns and Percy's *Reliques*; and Walter Scott from the *Border Ballads*. These were the fires at which they lit their torches; but then, just follow the growth and the history in each case of the torch. The borrowing is a very slight thing; it is what we do with the thing *after we have borrowed it* that determines whether we are the "true man" or "the thief." Cowper had more than one starting-point: his native gifts of feeling, and tenderness, and playful humour drew him to those who had

exhibited kindred gifts and graces. He was at Westminster School with many schoolfellows, and one schoolmaster, who permanently determined the direction of his genius—George Colman the elder (who, if the child is "father of the man," must have been a very comical boy!), and Churchill, the sturdy and fierce satirist that was to be. And when Cowper, more than thirty years afterwards, adopted the satiric form in the old Popian couplet, the influence of Churchill is beyond all mistake.

But the young Cowper was also a scholar, on the lines laid down at Westminster. He was for those days an excellent Latinist, and could not only enjoy good Latin verse, but could write it. And he had for his form-master an odd, eccentric, slovenly being, who seems to have had *this* for his one *raison d'être* in life—to impart to others not merely his scholarship, but the enjoyment of his rich vein of fancy and humour. This was Vincent, known better by the affectionate diminutive of "Vinny," Bourne, to whom yet another humourist, Charles Lamb, was afterwards to owe much pleasure and intellectual stimulus. Even under the disguising garb of modern Latin, it is easy to recognise that Bourne had much of the peculiar observation, as well as of the playfulness, which distinguished his pupil; something, too, of that fondness for animals, and for noting their ways, which followed Cowper through life, and made much of the happiness of

which he was capable. Bourne had written various little fables in various Latin metres on the "Glow-worm," the "Jackdaw," the "Cricket," and the "Parrot," and these had so lived in the heart of the pupil that he thought them worth turning into English verse and publishing them, together with much graver matter, in his first volume, as *Translations from Vincent Bourne.* Some of us may have read and remembered, I hope, "The Jackdaw":—

THE JACKDAW

There is a bird who by his coat,
And by the hoarseness of his note,
  Might be supposed a crow;
A great frequenter of the church,
Where, bishop-like, he finds a perch,
  And dormitory too.

Above the steeple shines a plate,
That turns and turns, to indicate
  From what point blows the weather;
Look up—your brains begin to swim,
'Tis in the clouds—that pleases *him*,
  He chooses it the rather!

Fond of the speculative height,
Thither he wings his airy flight,
  And thence securely sees
The bustle and the raree-show
That occupy mankind below,
  Secure and at his ease.

You think, no doubt, he sits and muses
On future broken bones and bruises
  If he should chance to fall!—
No: not a single thought like that
Employs his philosophic pate,
  Or troubles it at all.

He sees that this great roundabout
The world, with all its motley rout—
  Church, army, physic, law,
Its customs and its businesses—
Is no concern at all of his,
  And says—what says he?—"Caw."

Thrice happy bird! I too have seen
Much of the vanities of men;
  And sick of having seen 'em,
Would cheerfully these limbs resign
For such a pair of wings as thine,
  And such a head between 'em.

Cowper modestly calls this a "translation" from his old form-master's Latin verses, but it is far more. It is a transmutation and expansion; and the result is a new thing, stamped with the personality of the adapter. And how perfect it is, and what a good example of the essential value of perfection even in trifles! The humour, the pathos, the picturesqueness, the sense of the value of brevity and the *ne quid nimis*—how could these things be better shown? And this is the reward, among other matters, of not rushing into print, and not being ambitious for the kind of applause current in the "little day" for which the poet

writes—indeed, from not consulting or studying the "little day" at all!

It was as *satirist*, however, that Cowper made his first appeal to the reading public of his time. He was, as I have said, the schoolfellow, and in later life the profound admirer of Charles Churchill, that strange, strong genius, for whom satire was as the very breath of his nostrils;—Churchill, the ally of Wilkes, and coadjutor in the *North Briton*; author of those savage poems, "Gotham," and the "Prophecy of Famine." You have only to turn to the opening lines of Cowper's "Table Talk," and then to the opening lines of such a poem as Churchill's "Farewell," to detect the obligation of the disciple to his master. And yet, though the form and the turn of the verse are so like, the spirit is so different. For the style of the one is the rough, sledge-hammer, unscrupulous style, and the other that of the polished gentleman. One was the recreant clergyman, who had taken orders at the bidding of some of his family, who had essayed its duties, only to experience (as he said himself) that

> Sleep, at his bidding, crept from pew to pew.

The other, the essentially pious and reverent nature, whose weak point as a satirist was that he too often interspersed his wit and observation with such long and prosaic "screeds" of mere homiletics, that when the volume appeared, with its modest title of "Poems, by William Cowper of

the Inner Temple, Esq.," the slightest glance at its contents showed that it was from the hand of an ardently religious nature, burning to deliver himself of the great Evangelical message, which was everywhere, since Wesley and Whitfield, stirring into life the religious consciousness of the "common people," but *not* (as yet) that of the literary and artistic world. And it is not surprising that the volume of 1782 fell very flat. For it may be very true, as George Herbert had long before pleaded, that "a *verse* may find him who a sermon flies"; but in this case the "verse" and the "sermon" were one and the same thing; and the volatile and somewhat worldly devotees of the former did not see their way to distinguishing one from the other. Accordingly, as I have said, the volume fell very flat. The worldly were repelled by the undisguised religion that pervaded the whole; and the religious world of that day, no doubt in many cases, regarded verse (unless it was a hymn pure and simple) as unworthy of fallen man's attention, especially when, as in this instance, it was accompanied by much that was barefacedly humorous in treatment. And to this day, of course, though the two extremes just indicated have very much modified their attitude, these blended purposes and talents in Cowper have largely contributed to the neglect that has overtaken his poetry, with the exception of all but a few of his scattered lyrics. But, to show how much we lose by accepting these traditions, and not testing for ourselves, is

really one chief object of my being here to-day. What individuality there is in these satires of Cowper, based though they were upon Churchill, whose poetic master, in his turn, was Dryden! James Smith, of *Rejected Addresses* fame, described the poet Crabbe as "Pope in worsted stockings." It is a smart epigram, but no more precisely true than epigrams usually are. But if it were legitimate, we might further adapt it to Cowper, and call him "Pope in a white tie." Not that *that* would be true either. Cowper is indeed under some very obvious obligations to Pope. His little sketches of character, interspersed among matter purely didactic, his "Miss Bridgets," and "Voltaires"; his types of the Bore, and the Military Braggart; and the Squire's Son sent on his travels, only to show how the "dunce" when

> Sent to roam
> Excels the dunce that has been kept at home,

are clearly modelled on the "Chloes," and "Narcissas," and "Sir Balaams" of Pope. But then how different—just because the writers themselves were so different! The essence of Cowper, in such moods, is his *playfulness*, and playfulness had no part in the genius of Pope. There is a smile on the lip, and a twinkle in the eye, in Cowper's satire, as well as a recognition, all the while, of the "still, sad music of humanity"—a sense of the "pity of it all"—a spiritual quality, in short, which has no counterpart in the equipment of

the author of the *Dunciad*. Not that Cowper is incapable of scorn—it is indeed one of his strongest points—but then it is only for those who are as yet trifling with the graver aspects of religious truth and issues of human conduct. For the ordinary man of the world's attitude towards the faith which was all in all to *him*, he has no pity, or rather no patience. Take the wonderfully graphic (almost dramatic) picture of the amateur theologians—the *Bon-vivant*, the Colonel, the Ensign, and the young Chaplain—over their wine; discussing one of the cardinal doctrines of the newly revived religion, *Faith* as against *Works*. It is in the section of the satire called "Hope."

The inevitable influence of Pope is apparent in particular lines; but then, as I have said, being so *dramatic*, that circumstance alone breaks up and relieves the eternal recurrence of the epigrammatic couplet. It loses the Popian *finish*, but it gains in human reality. But the *belle-lettrists* (to use a newly coined word) of Cowper's day, if they might well have enjoyed the wit and humour of such a passage, saw clearly enough that it was to an extent levelled against them, and could not therefore be expected to greet it with any enthusiasm. Nor were the dozen or so of short lyrics, fables, and other, at the end of the volume, likely to counteract the bad impression. They were in the main fables, and elegant trifles of the same order;

but all of these evinced (to those who had ears to hear) that this strange religious satirist had mastered a lyric style of rare lucidity and grace, and an exquisite sense of the music of words and cadences, almost new of its kind in English verse—

O happy shades! to me unblest,
Friendly to peace, but not to me!
How ill the scene that offers rest,
And heart that cannot rest, agree!

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,
Those alders quivering to the breeze,
Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,
And please, if anything could please.

How perfect, how unimprovable,[1] are these stanzas! A single word of them could not be changed but at a loss. The thought, indeed, is commonplace, but only in the sense of being the common property of all real men who have thought deeply and suffered deeply. What is it but Coleridge's—

Ah, Lady, we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live,
Ours is her wedding-garment; ours her shroud

What is it, again, but the burden of Scott's lovely lines, "The Sun upon the Weirdlaw Hill":—

[1] [Would it not be an improvement if the second rime in the second stanza were on a different vowel from the second rime in the first?]

With listless look along the plain
I see Tweed's silver current glide;
And coldly mark the holy fane
Of Melrose rise in ruined pride.

The quiet lake, the balmy air,
The hill, the stream, the tower, the tree,—
Are they still such as once they were,
Or is the dreary change in me?

The "dejection" thus recorded had no doubt a different root in each of the three instances, but the changed relation of man to Nature under its influence is the same in all, and the influence in each case prompted poetry of unsurpassable charm.

Cowper's volume, notwithstanding, failed to attract notice. Of those who opened it at hazard, some would have been deterred by its obviously pietistic tendency; but the majority perhaps for another reason, that nine-tenths of its contents were moral satires, in the rhymed heroic couplet, and the crowd of Pope's imitators had succeeded in wearing this fabric very threadbare. The world was in truth beginning to tire of it, and had not the patience to detect the fresher accents of playfulness and grace that differentiated those of William Cowper. The volume, if it did not fall dead from the press, made its way slowly. But it was far otherwise with a second volume that followed it, three years later, bearing the title of *The Task, a Poem in Six Books.* The former volume had been suggested by Cowper's faithful Mrs. Unwin, as a refuge and a stimulus

for his melancholy. The second volume was the even happier suggestion of another lady, the charming and vivacious Lady Austen. She had often asked Cowper to write something in blank verse. He replied, "Give me a subject." "You can write on any subject," she archly rejoined. "Write upon this *Sofa*." Cowper was too gallant to refuse. He started with the uninspiring theme, but soon broke away to scenes and objects more congenial. This was the origin of the series of blank-verse poems, the better-known of which bear the far more attractive titles of "The Winter Evening," "The Winter Morning's Walk," and "The Garden." Although these poems, amounting in the aggregate to many thousand lines, occupied the bulk of the volume, he appended (as in his previous venture) a few others of different character, and among these the memorable ballad of *John Gilpin*. For this also (as is well known) Cowper was indebted to his fascinating friend. Lady Austen told him the story as actually having occurred within her knowledge, and it so delighted the poet that he turned it into verse that very night, and was heard laughing over it through all the quiet hours of slumber. The inimitable stanzas were printed in a magazine, and at once made their mark; and, further (strange fate for Cowper, to whom the theatre was the *bête noire* among all worldly entertainments!), were chosen for recitation by Henderson, a leading comedian of the day. *John Gilpin* doubtless attracted many

purchasers to the volume. But those who had come to laugh over the luckless horseman of Cheapside remained to pay a wholly different tribute of admiration elsewhere. It was the collection of blank verse called the *Task* that at once gave Cowper a leading place, if not *the* leading place, among the poets of the day.

There were not many poets deserving the name then living. The great forerunner of them all in reviving an interest in *nature*, as distinguished from *human nature*, James Thomson, the author of the *Seasons*, had been dead nearly forty years. Those who had carried on the work, producing little in amount, but that little of exquisite quality—Goldsmith, Gray, Collins, Shenstone—had also passed away. Crabbe, indeed, had written his *Village*, and Burns was on the eve of giving to the world his first poems, but, with few exceptions, this was the deadest period of English poetry. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, were still to be; and yet there was being fostered in silence an ardent desire and longing for that familiarity with Nature which had been so long dormant. "You may drive out Nature at the point of a pitchfork," says the Roman poet, "but she *will* come back." Nature had been thus kept at bay in the carefully polished and regulated verse of Alexander Pope and his followers. They had carried the maxim that

> The proper study of mankind is man

to lengths and deductions which the words cannot

reasonably bear. Nature had been called in, now and then, as a garnish by these poets, but even this "garnish" they borrowed from one another. They had certain words or phrases for certain aspects of natural scenery, and these did duty over and over again in endless permutations and combinations. The "nymphs" and the "swains," the "gale," the "azure main," the "grove," the "bard," the "pilgrim," the "bowers," the "verdure"—all these and a hundred other terms had become the stock-in-trade of the hack-poet; until at last readers of poetry began to sicken and to crave for some real nourishment, and not this sandy and sterile imitation of nourishment. I remember, when I was a child, there was a *Joe Miller's Jest-Book* in our library, and in it a pleasantry which greatly tickled my childish fancy. It described how, in a certain besieged town, the scarcity of food became very severe; and when there was not a blade of grass left for the horses, the inhabitants hit upon the ingenious expedient of putting "green spectacles" on the horses and then giving them shavings to eat! This may serve very well as an allegory. The so-called descriptions of Nature in the Popian school were as unreal and as innutritious as *shavings*, and those to whom they had been offered were beginning to find out the difference, that eyes were better than spectacles.

Well, the reaction had begun some fifty years before Cowper published his first poem, in which

he reflected her so truly, and made others share his happiness in so doing. Thomson's *Seasons* is the first notable English poem that takes Nature herself as a topic. He was handicapped, as all poets of the second rank begin by being handicapped, by his following too servilely a model. The model of Thomson's blank verse was Milton, and his treatment of blank verse abounds from first to last in Miltonic echoes. It was unfortunate for his fame, for much of the real and genuine individuality of Thomson is thereby concealed, and passes unobserved by his reader. We of this day, I must admit, can hardly read Thomson with patience. The form and diction of those once famous poems repel us. They are so like certain other versifiers, that we fancy we must have heard it all before. But when Thomson began to write, men had not heard it all before! He was no dealer in natural scenery at second hand and on trust. The storm and the calm, the aspects of the fields and woods changing from season to season—these he had watched and noted and treasured up in the days when he wandered as a boy through the fields surrounding his father's manse. Thomson was a conscientious watcher and lover of Nature; his matter, which was his own, was hindered by his manner, which was somebody else's. It is so, as I have said, with many poets of similar rank. They really have some "new wine" of their own to benefit their kind, only they persevere in serving it up in the "old

bottles." And this is why for us, living a century or more afterwards, it is difficult to arouse interest in what seems to be still part and parcel of an old order. But the contemporaries of these poets recognised the "new wine," and were grateful for it, and overlooked the want of originality in the "bottle." Thomson made his mark just because he brought something of his own that the heart of man was yearning for. Goldsmith clung to the rhymed couplet of Pope, but in his hands it became the vehicle of such a new beauty and tenderness that he made the world for ever his debtor. Gray had the insight to perceive that the heroic couplet had had its day, and he framed his matchless *Elegy* in the less familiar form of stanzas. And thus, little by little, whether in the old bottles or the new, the supreme and imperishable wine of Nature—her ever-shifting aspects of beauty, and her power to purify and to delight and to soothe—was being given back to a world of literature from which it had long been absent.

But it is interesting to note, that even while Nature was coming slowly back and resuming her charm, it was some time before she was known and recognised aright. The world was so hungering for *green* food, after so much *dry*, that it at first devoured, without much perception, whatever had a *prima facie* claim to be the genuine thing. I remember an incident that I once witnessed in the streets of London, many years ago, that always

seemed to me an undesigned allegory of this state of poetic famine in the last century. I was walking in the East City, not far from the Docks, and I saw a group of sailors, evidently just come ashore, and just paid off. A poor woman was standing by the way with a tray of water-cresses, upon which the sailors made a sudden and unanimous descent, consuming the whole trayful in quicker time than it takes me to write the words, and (I need not add) duly paying for their purchase with that prodigality that marks the British tar when in funds. The situation was unmistakable. Months of dry biscuit and salt junk had done their work, and the tempting green herb was too much for them. This, for a while, was the condition of the English reader of poetry, and for the while they were often deceived by much so-called "poetry of Nature," with which, indeed, it is only unfair to the savoury and refreshing water-cress to compare it for a moment!

The most memorable of these counterfeits was Mr. Macpherson's *Ossian*, in which he professed to be giving a true version of scattered fragments of a Gaelic epic. This, with its grandiose and very monotonous rhapsodies—to us now unreadable—came to the English reader of that day as a revolution and a revelation. It was so full of big out-door things—the storm, the mist, the mountain. To read it seemed for the moment so like being let out upon a

Scottish moor, after being confined all day to some close and mechanical occupation, that its reception was extraordinary, and not only in England, but in foreign countries. It was not indeed Nature, but it produced a vague effect of being so. Wordsworth said, with perfect truth, that much of the English *Ossian* was composed of mere words borrowed from the traditional vocabulary, and that there was no first-hand observation in it at all. Its imagery was "spurious," but it was accepted with joy by starving thousands. Nevertheless, the true thing did not fail to strike home when it appeared, and Cowper's second volume at once showed Englishmen that the true thing was there. There was, no doubt, something of inferior origin blended with it. There are prosaic and dreary lengths of moralising in the *Task*; there is even a great deal of what one of his biographers has called "mischievous rant," for Cowper, with all his goodness and sweetness, was not exempt from the law that men are bound to write nonsense when they write about things, such as "geology," for instance, of which they are wholly ignorant. But it was neither the moralisings nor the religious denunciations that made these poems a revelation and a delight. It was not even the witty and felicitous lines and phrases which are plentiful, and are still imbedded in the daily speech of many who never read a poem of Cowper straight through in their lives—

England, with all thy faults, I love thee still.

There is a pleasure in poetic pains
Which only poets know.

The toil
Of dropping buckets into empty wells,
And growing old in drawing nothing up!

The cup that cheers but not inebriates—

and a dozen more. Rather was it the home-felt scenes in the "Winter Morning's Walk" and the "Walk at Noon" and the "Winter Evening," in which Cowper was describing things, not only which he remembered in far-off days of childhood, but which he was actually living among and loving while he wrote. These descriptions were doubtless to Cowper's first readers, and still more to us, hampered by being often expressed in a metre too closely modelled upon another poet, Milton; but the descriptions were at *first* hand, not *second*, and they were prompted by deep personal affection and deep personal piety. When he speaks of the incidents of a country walk, and the features of a country lane, he speaks of what he knows. Here are no longer vague platitudes about the "grove" and the "plain" and the "bowers" (to rhyme with flowers!), but the eye of the minute observer—minute as Wordsworth or Tennyson long afterwards—lines such as

Ankle-deep in moss and flowery thyme

(which is Tennyson all over), and the clear, dis-

tinctive treatment of the trees (no longer lumped together as the *grove*)—

> The poplar that with silver lines his leaf,
> And ash far-stretching his umbrageous arm;
> Of deeper green the elm; and deeper still,
> Lord of the woods, the long-surviving oak.

Cowper had not been writing long about the *Sofa* (the opening poem of the series) when his ardent love of Nature drove him out of doors, to the meadows and the lanes of Olney, to the fresh air and the sweet sights and sounds of country. And this "first-handedness" of his is just as apparent when he writes of man—man as he watched him daily on his village walks, not man as he analysed him from his Calvinistic standpoint, or from books. In the days of our grandfathers every one knew and could cite Cowper's picture of the village postman, with his "twanging horn":—

> He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
> With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks,
> News from all nations lumbering at his back.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,
> Cold and yet cheerful.

A description that is simply Shakspearian; a worthy pendant to the smith in *King John*, rushing from his anvil

> With slippers thrust upon contrary feet.

But only Shakspearian, of course (for I do

not think Cowper read or cared much about "play-actors"), because both men drew the thing they had seen.

This, then, it was that fascinated the weary poetry-reader of 1785, and gave Cowper at once a supreme place among poets then living. For there were elements beyond even the reach of Thomson in these new poems of country life. There was a minuter and more immediate observation of things, whether human nature or the natural objects of the landscape. The observation embraced more *detail*, more precision, and the charm that ever accompanies these things. Thomson had doubtless *seen* the things he sought to convey in his verse; but he drew largely from memory, and after the things had gone through some process of adaptation to the supposed claims of poetic convention. Thomson's natural history is apt to become *academic* in the process; Cowper's remains a transcript, pure and simple. And, moreover, Thomson's *attitude* to Nature was different from Cowper's. His was the deistic attitude; but Cowper's, equally reverential, was tinged with the emotion of personal thankfulness and trust. You remember the once famous hymn with which Thomson closes his *Seasons*:—

> These, as they change, Almighty Father, these,
> Are but the varied God. The rolling year
> Is full of Thee.

Compare with this the somewhat similar apo-

strophe which Cowper makes a peroration to his "Winter Morning Walk," and which it is quite conceivable was even prompted by the recollection of the passage in Thomson. It is in fact really different in motive, and the difference is just that which made people feel here was a new and a safer guide to the worship of Nature than they had hitherto acknowledged in the author of the *Seasons*. The whole passage is too long to read, but it opens with the line—

> So reads he Nature, whom the Lamp of *Truth*
> Illuminates.

And it goes on to the fine lines, at least lofty and noble rhetoric if not the highest poetry—

> Thee we reject, unable to abide
> Thy purity, till, pure as Thou art pure,
> Made such by Thee, we love Thee for that cause
> For which we shunned and hated Thee before.
> Then we are free: then Liberty like day
> Breaks on the soul, and by a flash from Heaven
> Fires all the faculties with glorious joy.

Cowper is not one of those poets who have directly founded or influenced a school of poets. He stands, from this point of view, rather aside, in a back-water. His obvious and close association with a certain school of theology in great part accounts for this. But poets are not without their influence on the subsequent progress of poetry merely because they have not inspired or guided any particular disciple. There is such a

thing as influencing the general atmosphere in which the poetic heart and spirit of man alone can thrive; and I think Cowper did this for his generation and those that followed. He greatly widened the range and scope of subjects in which it was supposed poetry had any right to intervene. For though Cowper lived in the country, and made his friendships largely among ladies—Mrs. Unwin, Lady Hesketh, Lady Austen, —it is quite a wrong idea of him to imagine that the subjects which interested him were all or chiefly of the same sort. He was a thorough Englishman. He took a keen interest in all that interested his countrymen at home or abroad. The revolt of the American Colonies, the crusade against the Slave Trade, the establishment of our rule in India; these were all to Cowper matters of liveliest concern, as were all public calamities or disasters at home, such as the burning of Lord Mansfield's library, or the wreck of the *Royal George*; the latter of which events, as you know, prompted that noble threnody, of which Mr. F. T. Palgrave does not say too much when he says that "this little poem might be called one of our trial pieces in regard to taste," and dwells upon the "vigour of description and the force of pathos underlying Cowper's bare and truly Greek simplicity of phrase."

This age of ours is an impatient age. We like our poetry in small doses rather than in long draughts. And it is not likely that we

shall ever be able again to call Cowper's *Task* a popular poem. But happily for his fame many of his masterpieces are brief, and being both one and the other, can never die. No greater depth of tenderness, combined with absolute perfection of form, exists in our literature than in certain of the shorter poems of William Cowper; notably the effusions which speak of the womanly love and devotion that saved at least a remnant of his life from absolute misery and despair:—"Mary! I want a lyre with other strings," and "The twentieth year is well nigh past."

Such, then, I conceive is Cowper's contribution to the poetic history of the last century, which he did not live to see. He was the resultant of all the great forces that were at work in his day. It is a commonplace of criticism that he owed much to Rousseau. The keen love of freedom, the sense of the dignity of man as man, the growth of pity and sympathy for all living things—animals as well as human beings,—the quickened love of Nature, all that was best and enduring in the great truths that were stirring men in the last quarter of the last century are all reflected in Cowper; and his saving sense of humour preserved him from any of the pedantries and extravagances of certain new gospels of humanity. He was not less the disciple of Rousseau because he clearly saw the defective side of Rousseau's views of children's education. "I will not ask

Jean-Jacques Rousseau if birds confabulate or no," he says, at the opening of one of his charming fables, for Rousseau had solemnly enjoined that to give children stories about animals *talking* was "to weaken their sense of truth" ! ! !

And I hope I have shown that Cowper, though he formed no school, was yet an important person in the development of the poetry of the last hundred years. In one of his poems he apologises for even referring to John Bunyan,—"ingenious dreamer!" he calls him—so "despised a name" was the author of the *Pilgrim's Progress* to the wits and persons of taste of the year 1780. I will not so apologise for mentioning Cowper, for, thanks to our Wordsworth, our Keats, our Tennyson, we have learned to be thankful to all those who have opened our eyes and softened our hearts to the beauty and the pathos of the world in which we live.

SOME LEADERS IN THE POETIC REVIVAL OF 1760–1820

II

BURNS

1759–1796

I CANNOT forbear entering some kind of apology that, being an Englishman and English-bred, I should presume to lay unhallowed hands upon the ark of the poetry and the reputation of Robert Burns. I may plead, however, in mitigation of any harsh sentence likely to be pronounced on me, that if I err, not being a Scotsman, in commenting upon one of the greatest of Scottish poets and humourists to an English audience, it has been not from any desire to shine as an exception to English apathy and incapacity in the matter, but simply and solely because from my early childhood I heard Burns read and quoted in my own home, and was taught and shown how high was his place in a literature which I cannot refuse to call *English* literature, merely because he wrote

his most characteristic work in a north-country dialect.

But I am well aware that this much explanation is not an adequate defence for my conduct. My real motive is one of a "missionary" order—a desire to encourage others in making or improving their acquaintance with one of the greatest names in poetry—which we all recognise and confess as such, but which I believe is still, after a hundred years, little more than a name to hundreds, even of those who read and enjoy other poetry of the highest kind. I was speaking last week of a considerable English poet, Cowper, who once enjoyed in England a reputation proportionate to his merits, but who has lost it through lapse of time, and change of taste, and the rise of poets of greater power and passion. Cowper is forgotten, as one old-fashioned. But Robert Burns never has been, I venture to think, widely read and known in England—save in half-a-dozen of his poems, and a score or so of quotations from the rest. And one prime reason, no doubt, is that he wrote his best in a dialect not in itself difficult, because of its grammar or idiom, but certainly comprising a large vocabulary, strange and repellent to the ordinary reader. And the ordinary reader (if I may say so without offence) is always intolerant of taking trouble. Even Tennyson, when he wrote in the North Lincolnshire vernacular, which he knew so well, and though his greatest achievements as a humourist

were won in that dialect, has never been properly known in that character. If I may quote my own experience, I have on many occasions read the "Northern Farmer" and the "Spinster's Sweetarts" in some company where many have admitted afterwards that the very look of the spelling had deterred them from ever seeking to master the preliminary difficulty. That exquisite singer, Mr. William Barnes, the Dorsetshire poet, whom the late Francis Turner Palgrave has sought, I fear in vain, to popularise, is practically unknown as a poet. And the far greater poet, Burns, has shared much of the same fate; and though we quote him, and recognise him when quoted, after a fashion, it is to be feared that many of us are in the same plight as honest Mr. Micawber who, when citing from Burns's familiar "Auld Lang Syne," to young David Copperfield, the lines—

> We twa hae run about the braes,
> And pu'd the gowans fine,

was constrained to add, with the old roll in his voice, "I am not *aware* what the 'gowans' *may be*; but I am sure that my friend Copperfield and myself would have taken a pull at them, had it been feasible."

Then again, let it be freely admitted that when the dialect difficulty is surmounted (and it is not half as great as persons imagine!), there is a certain admixture of free-speech, both on religious topics and others, and a good deal of drinking

and other recreations in Burns's humorous poems that easily repel those scrupulous in such matters; and many persons never care, and apparently never *like*, to distinguish between satire on religious bigotry and hypocrisy, and ridicule of religion itself—so that there are, and always will be, deterrents in abundance for those whose digestion, in matters of literary food, is somewhat weak—although I would add, by way of parenthesis, that up and down our beloved country at the present moment there may be seen novels and novelettes, with the stamp of Mr. Mudie or Mr. Smith upon their brows, infinitely more unwholesome and demoralising than anything in Robert Burns. But this is a digression. I would only plead in behalf of this consummate poet and humourist, that he has his enemies or indifferents, and that I would fain convert a few of these into friends and enthusiasts.

Another obstacle to the diffusion of his fame arises out of the dialect difficulty already mentioned. Burns, as you all know, wrote for the most part in the peasant-speech of his native Ayrshire. It should at once be said that all his most memorable and enduring work was so written. But he occasionally wrote in the English tongue, or rather in the literary, the poetic diction of the eighteenth century. He certainly understood his own vernacular—its resources, capabilities, opportunities, far better than he knew those of our southern English speech; for he had drunk

it in, so to speak, with his mother's milk; it was the everyday speech of his family and neighbours; and it was the language of those Scottish lyrists and satirists, his predecessors, to whom he was most indebted as models. Now the English lover of poetry, when urged by Burns enthusiasts to enter upon the study of that poet, is naturally under the strong temptation to tackle him on his easiest and most familiar side—to follow the line (as it were) "of least resistance," and to begin with his English poems, or at least with those in which there is some admixture of literary English—for Burns occasionally uses English and lowland Scotch side by side in the same poem. But when the reader turns to Burns writing *English*, it is certain that he encounters a Burns writing under disadvantages, and therefore a Burns *not at his best.* I cannot go as far as certain critics of Burns, who will tell you, as Mr. Henley tells you, that English was to Burns "a foreign language." This seems to me a serious over-statement of the case. Burns had read, and thoroughly mastered—as men do who have access to only a few cherished volumes—a fair number of English poets. His father, an admirable specimen of the best type of Scottish peasant—industrious, upright, religious, and with the traditional Scottish love and respect for *Education*,—had brought his children up to believe in book-learning, and the profit of it. Little by little, throughout their constant poverty, some-

thing had been spared for *books*, and copies of the Scottish poets on the one hand—Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, and the rest; and on the other hand, the eighteenth-century English poets then most in vogue—Pope, Shenstone, Thomson, Gray, Young (and doubtless also certain of the feebler imitators of these poets), were among the volumes which stimulated the fancy and the ambition of the youthful Burns. Now, while this was not by any means so bad a training in the English grammar and idiom, it was certainly not the best training for writing English poetry. Of the really great English models—of the great Elizabethans and their immediate successors—Burns had not drunk deeply, though he certainly knew and quoted Shakspeare. His English style was formed upon a poetic school already in its decadence. The "poetic diction" of which we were speaking in my former lecture—the poetic phraseology and vocabulary which had come, by the end of the last century, to be accepted as a poet's sufficient equipment; the conventional verbiage against which Wordsworth first did noble service in protesting; the once familiar occurrence in every fresh poem of the "bard," and the "grove," and the "gale," and the "pilgrim," and the "nymph," and the "swain"—was in full force when Burns began to write verse, and it was inevitable that these should reappear there as soon as he began to write in a language, certainly not "foreign to him," but which he had learned

chiefly, or wholly, from *books*—from those English literary models to which alone he had access.

And this seems the common-sense of the whole matter. When Burns wrote verse in English, he wrote it under the influence of bad models, and he did not quite know the difference between bad models and good. Accordingly, when he wrote *songs* in pure English (he did not write many) he seldom rose above the commonplace. But when he introduced English into his narrative and didactic poems, he often did so with real effect; and when he contrived, as sometimes he did, to *forget the bad models* altogether, he often wrote both simply and eloquently. Moreover, Burns was neither indiscriminate nor inartistic in his use of English. He seemed generally to know when the transition from lowland Scotch to English could be effectively made. As a general rule, he perceived that as long as he was dealing with scenes and incidents purely Scottish, he must retain the speech of the people, as part of the local colour. When he digressed into reflections or topics abstract and general in their character, he perhaps as naturally had recourse to the language of the larger British world. Take the beautiful poem called the "Vision," from the first published volume of 1786; as long as the poet is describing the doings and thoughts of a Scottish peasant at the close of a hard day's toil, he uses the vernacular with his usual skill and humour:—

The sun had closed the winter day,
The curlers quat their roaring play,
And hungered maukin' ta'en her way
To kail-yards green,
While faithless snaws ilk step betray
Where she has ben.

The thresher's weary flingin'-tree
The lee-lang day had tired me;
And when the day had closed his e'e
Far i' the west,
Ben i' the spence right pensivelie
I gaed to rest.

All in this mottie, misty clime,
I backward mused on wasted time
How I had spent my youthfu' prime
And done nae thing
But stringin' blethers up in rhyme
For fools to sing.

But as the poem advances, and the young man dreams his dream, and the guardian spirit of his country appears to console and encourage him in his task of interpreting the joys and sorrows and aspirations of his people in song, the vernacular gives place to a strain of purest English, in which even the familiar vocabulary of the eighteenth-century English poets all but disappears—

"I saw thy pulse's maddening play
Wild send thee pleasure's devious way,
Misled by fancy's meteor-ray,
By passion driven;
But yet the light that led astray,
Was light from heaven.

"Then never murmur nor repine,
Strive in thy humble sphere to shine;
And, trust me, not Potosi's mine
Nor king's regard
Can give a bliss o'ermatching thine,
A rustic Bard.

"To give my counsels all in one—
Thy tuneful flame still careful fan,
Preserve the dignity of man
With soul erect;
And trust the Universal Plan
Will all protect.

"And wear thou this," she solemn said,
And bound the Holly round my head;
The polished leaves and berries red
Did rustling play;
And like a passing thought she fled
In light away.

I cannot think that the writer of this last stanza—so nobly simple, so free from rhetoric, so musically perfect—had much to learn in the management of the English tongue; or the writer of such stanzas as these in the "Jolly Beggars," lines which have never been rivalled in sheer force by any Englishman, unless it be Jonathan Swift—

A fig for those by law protected,
Liberty's a glorious feast!
Courts for cowards were erected,
Churches built to please the priest.

What is title, what is treasure,
What is reputation's care?
If we lead a life of pleasure,
'Tis no matter how or where.

Life is all a *variorum*,
We regard not how it goes;
Let *them* cant about decorum,
Who have characters to lose!

I can never think that to the man who wrote those lines English was "a foreign tongue." The truth is, that when Burns was deeply moved, or carried away by the whirlwind of his prodigal fancy, he forgets models altogether, and among them models of English, and becomes as modern and universal as Shakspeare himself became under like conditions.

This question of the "bi-lingual" gift of Burns comes specially before us in the memorable first volume that he published in 1786, commonly known as the "Kilmarnock" edition, from the country town in Ayrshire in which it was printed. *Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, was its title; but it contained more poems of which the literary English formed at least a part than (I imagine) any subsequent similar body of his verse comprised. This volume, containing about forty pieces, of varying length, was the first intimation to any Scotsmen, outside the circle of Burns's friends and neighbours, that a new poet of unquestionable originality, of poetic quality and humour equally decisive, had appeared in Scotland. In *one* sense the volume did not bear upon its face the mark of originality, and Burns himself, with a manly modesty, the genuineness of which at all periods of his career there

is no reason to doubt, disclaims both originality and deprecates comparison with those to whom he frankly admitted his indebtedness. He believes (so he admits in his Preface) that he has something to say worth saying, or he would not have ventured into print; "but," he goes on to say, "to the genius of a Ramsay, or the glorious dawnings of the poor unfortunate Fergusson, he, with equal unaffected sincerity, declares that even in his highest pulse of vanity he has not the most distant pretensions. These two justly-admired Scotch poets he has often had in his eye in the following pieces; but rather with a view to kindle at their flame than for servile imitation."

Considering the verdict of the English-speaking world since pronounced on the respective merits of Burns and the poets here named, this is singularly pathetic; but at the same time, knowing the public whom he was immediately addressing, the disclaimer was natural. For the Scottish wits and critics in Edinburgh or elsewhere, taking up this first volume of the Ayrshire ploughman, would be first of all struck by the apparent *absence of novelty* in the verses therein contained. For almost every topic and every metrical form employed had been used before by Scottish versifiers of more or less note, and especially by Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson, of whom Burns makes this special mention; the very metre which we English readers (the

majority of whom perhaps know no Scottish poetry save Burns and Walter Scott) probably imagine to be Burns's own invention, or at least specially characteristic of Burns, the six-line stanza :—

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
> To see oursels as ithers see us !
> It wad frae monie a blunder free us,
> An' foolish notion :
> What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
> And even devotion !

This metre had been the common property not only of Ramsay and Fergusson, but of much earlier Scottish poets—the metre being in fact an adaptation from an ancient French metre, well known to the Troubadours. Then, again, the familiar epistle in verse which Burns wrote in this stanza had been used by his predecessors—and both Ramsay and Fergusson wrote satire in verse to excellent purpose ;—so that, as I have said, when they looked chiefly on the surface of things, the Scottish critics of 1786 might well have taken Burns at his word and decided that here was a moderately successful imitation of the two poets named. But a little further examination could leave no doubt in the minds of those who had ears to hear, and hearts to feel, and a sense of humour to enjoy.

The "Kilmarnock" volume does not indeed represent Burns at his highest. It is not the Burns of "Mary Morison," and "Ae fond kiss and then we sever"; of "Duncan Gray," and

"John Anderson, my jo"; of "Holy Willie's Prayer," and "Tam o' Shanter." The first published work of a new poet must be of necessity tentative; and Burns was, in a sense, trying his "'prentice-han'." It was the reception given to his first volume that made him sure of his ground, and eager to better the best of what he had done. But, after all such allowance made, the volume was an astonishing revelation of a new poetic force being in the world. For, on one side of Burns's many-sided talent, it contained the "Address to a Mountain Daisy," and the "Address to a Mouse, on turning her up in her Nest with the Plough"; on another, it had the "Twa Dogs," and "Hallowe'en," the "Holy Fair," and the "Address to the Deil"; on another, the Epistles to Rankin and Lapraik; and on another, the "Cotter's Saturday Night." In many of these kinds, Burns was yet to do better things—things more distinctly revealing genius—in the future. In one kind, indeed (by which Burns was to attain his greatest height as a poet, pure and simple), the "Kilmarnock" volume is almost without example. The *Song* is all but entirely absent—being represented by two specimens only, hardly worth notice.

But one poem was there—in the familiar metre,—winding up the volume, which demands particular notice, so pathetic is it in its forecast of the subsequent fortunes of Robert Burns. The "Bard's Epitaph"—placed last in the book, as if

serving as a kind of comment on all that had gone before—is (as it were) his own epitaph, one written in conscious anticipation of his own sad and chequered life. To quote the line from Langhorne which the young Walter Scott, on the only occasion of meeting Burns, was so proud to know and tell the authorship of,[1] this epitaph

Gives the sad presage of his future years.

All lovers of Burns will remember the stanzas :—

Is there a whim-inspired fool,
Owre fast for thought, owre hot for rule,
Owre blate to seek, owre proud to snool,
Let him draw near ;
And o'er this grassy heap sing dool,
And drap a tear.

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[1] ["I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Ferguson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remember the celebrated Mr. Dugald Stewart. Of course, we youngsters sate silent, looked and listened. The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns's manner was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on the one side, on the other his widow with a child in her arms. These lines were written beneath :

Cold on Canadian hills or Minden's plain
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain ;
Bent o'er her babe her eye dissolved in dew,
The big drops, mingling with the milk he drew,
Gave the sad presage of his future years,
The child of misery baptised in tears.

Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather, the ideas it suggested to his mind. He actually shed tears. He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of 'The Justice of the Peace.' I whispered my information to a friend present, who mentioned it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and a word which, though of mere civility, I then received, and still recollect, with very great pleasure."—Letter to Lockhart, 1827.]

Is there a bard of rustic song,
Who, noteless, steals the crowds among,
That weekly this arèa throng,
Oh pass not by!
But with a frater-feeling strong,
Here heave a sigh.

Is there a man whose judgment clear
Can others teach the course to steer,
Yet runs, himself, life's mad career,
Wild as the wave;
Here pause—and, thro' the starting tear,
Survey this grave.

The poor inhabitant below
Was quick to learn and wise to know,
And keenly felt the friendly glow
And *softer flame*;
But thoughtless follies laid him low,
And stained his name!

Reader, attend—whether thy soul
Soars fancy's flights beyond the pole,
Or darkling grubs this earthly hole,
In low pursuit;
Know prudent, cautious, *self-control*
Is wisdom's root.

It seems to me certain that in writing this imaginary epitaph, Burns had himself in view; his own dangers and temptations; his anticipatory verdict on his own life should it be lived to the end, under certain clouds that were already gathering. And it is significant that Burns, whose use of italics is always noticeable, thus underlines two expressions in this poem—first, the "*softer flame*," and secondly, "*self-control*."

I am speaking of Burns as a poet; and certainly have no wish to fall in with the tendency of most Burns critics of the day, and devote my efforts to weighing and balancing the good and evil in his character. It has come of late to be a practice, where there is little or no difference of opinion among the critics as to a man's genius, to open an entirely new inquest into his moral character. It is notorious, for instance, that many readers of poetry, and still more numerous critics, appear to be more interested in Shelley's matrimonial troubles than in his matchless poetry. And one notices that, especially since the Burns Centenary of a few years since, the same tendency has developed itself in his case; and the critics are just now much exercised as to the amount of blame to be attached to the poet for certain grievous offences against morality, which are not denied by either party. I will not join them in this, save so far as in noticing how far the effect of these offences, and the discrepancies between his creed and his practice in that respect, are brought before us in his works. For the moment, the citation just made may suffice. But one result of the unquestionable incongruity of Burns's moral "didactic" with much of his practice is that it has led his critics, and doubtless many of his general readers, to lay stress upon such incongruity, to the extent of doubting whether the fine and noble ethical teaching of many of Burns's poems was actually genuine. And this not only

in Burns's relations to women, but in his relation to the religion of his native country. As to the first-named class of cases, if one may pardonably talk of "inconsistency" between a man's principles and his practice, then Burns was undoubtedly inconsistent, for he has left us many such avowals as that we have just heard of what he knew to be the true source of dignity and happiness, ideals to which he was himself so often false. There was a dual personality in Burns, as in every one of us, and they alternated in him often (as also in us) with startling contrasts. And, if this be true, it is, in my judgment, but shallow criticism to speak as if the "bad" half, the "shady side," of Burns was really the *true* Burns, and as if the other was a mere concession to the tastes or prejudices of his more respectable neighbours. When Burns published his first volume at Kilmarnock he was an unknown man, and the outcry against any of his moral delinquencies, and the discussion over them, could not have started save among a few of his nearest neighbours. But the contents of Burns's first volume must even thus early have awakened curiosity as to his attitude towards religion, for the volume contained both the "Holy Fair" and the "Cotter's Saturday Night." "Superstition and hypocrisy" are, in his own words, the topics illustrated in the former poem. Whereas (as we all know) the latter presents one of the most noble and endearing aspects of religion, considered as the strength and glory of a

people, that have ever been revealed to us in prose or verse.

Now there is no personal inconsistency in this instance. The startling differences presented are not in Burns himself—his principles and his practice, his mood to-day and his mood to-morrow—the differences lay in the religion of Scotland. Burns had become familiar with what religion in the family meant, by the example of his own father, a devout Scottish peasant of the finest type of integrity and patient toil. The other type of religion he had come to know through watching it in certain of the elders of the kirk in the presbytery of Ayr. "Holy Willie's Prayer" (the most transcendent religious satire ever penned) was yet to come, but the picture is foreshadowed in the "Holy Fair."

For the moment, I would deal with the "Cotter's Saturday Night." Of all Burns's longer poems, this is certainly the one best known to the purely English reader. And this for two reasons mainly. One reason, the less dignified, may be that half the stanzas or more are written in literary English, and only the remainder in the dialect of Ayrshire. Half of it is thus intelligible to the meanest capacity. The other reason (far worthier) is the picture just referred to, of religion purifying and dignifying the home of Scottish peasant life. Now, of course, the value of such a picture depends wholly on its fidelity to truth. If Burns had evolved such a picture out of his own

poet's imagination in order to win applause from religious people, "the unco guid," at a distance, he would be open to the charge of "sentimentality," which certain influential critics of to-day have not scrupled to bring against him. But I have never heard it advanced that Burns was not drawing his picture from the life, or that even in Holy Willie's day religion was not still the strength and glory of many a Scottish home. What is meant by Burns's sentimentality is, therefore, something different, and must be that in thinking it worth while to draw such a picture, he was not expressing his own sentiments, but only making a concession to the sentimentality of others. Now this is a view I wholly dissent from. I am certain that the "Cotter's Saturday Night" expresses Burns's heart-felt estimate of the worth and dignity of true religion; just as his "Holy Willie" expresses his detestation of the *Brummagem* Pharisee—for the two things are separated by a whole heaven. "Sentimentality," moreover, is a thing that does not last. Like a bad *veneer*, the surface wears away with time, and the cheap timber underneath stands revealed. Much of Sterne's sentiment (not all) has perished in this way—and perhaps all of his imitator, James Mackenzie. Burns's *true* sentiment is as pure and sweet and true to-day as it was on the day, a hundred years ago, when it disclosed a new poet as having arisen to enrich his native country.

The impression of sentimentality that might

be left upon some of us by the poem is doubtless favoured by the English stanzas being written, as already noticed, under the influence of that literary diction of the close of the last century with which Burns was most familiar. The poem itself is a delightful instance of Burns's power to imitate a predecessor, and yet to throw him absolutely into the shade. The "Cotter's Saturday Night" is clearly based upon the "Farmer's Ingle" of Robert Fergusson, which latter poem describes in vernacular Scotch the "end of the day" in the household of a small farmer, or cotter; and it is written in a nine-lined stanza, roughly resembling the "Spenserian." The idea and the form were thus alike borrowed by Burns; but the result—oh, how different! Poor Fergusson, had he lived to read it, might well have cried with Andrea del Sarto in Browning's fine monologue—

> But all the play, the insight, and the stretch,
> Out of me, out of me!

First of all Burns puts the metre right, restoring the Spenserian interlacing of the rhymes, and making the ninth an Alexandrine—giving thereby to his poem a dignity and artistic finish to which Fergusson could never approach. Then, again, he innovates, by passing alternately from lowland Scotch to English; and it is this which I believe some of the more devout Burnsians among his countrymen are given to deplore. As a humble English critic I again venture to differ. Although

the Scottish portion is in the language of the life he knew, and the English is the reflection of his experience of books, I recognise a distinct artistic purpose in the alternations, which to some persons only present a scrappy and incongruous medley; a purpose which I have already discussed in speaking of the "Vision." In the present case Burns not so much alternates stanzas in English and Scotch, as alternates words and idioms in the same stanza; but the reason seems to me analogous to that already suggested: that it is the essential dignity of the thought that lifts him for the moment into a speech more universal, less local, than his own. I cannot regard it as merely a foolish literary ambition that now and again leads Burns to abandon one dialect in which he was *strong* for another in which he was *weak*. It was rather that his local vocabulary was limited for the purpose he needed it for, and that he naturally and rightly resorted to English wherewith to supplement and strengthen it.

Unquestionably there is a sentimental side to Burns, which was due to the particular moment in the history of literature at which his genius first bore fruit. The Kilmarnock edition contains several poems (and these among his most admired and famous) making this evident, notably the "Address to the Field Mouse" turned up in her nest with the plough, and that to the "Mountain Daisy" on the similar disaster that befell it. Perhaps these are scorned by the same critics as

"sentimental," but the world of readers have hitherto not been of the same mind. We turn away with distaste from Sterne weeping over his dead donkey, but not from Burns pausing to pity the homeless mouse or the crushed daisy. The truth is that we instinctively associate such a display of feeling in Burns with other influences than those under which the author of the *Sentimental Journey* composed his rhapsodies. When Burns wrote, the influence of Rousseau—on his best and wholesomest side—was in the air, and the attitude of man to Nature, both animate and inanimate, had been profoundly affected by it. We have noted it in Cowper, who was in one respect a very child of Rousseau, though his fine sense of humour made him detect clearly Rousseau's many absurdities. But a new affection for Nature, different from all that had gone before in the eighteenth century, had sprung up in men's hearts, and notably a sympathy with animals and flowers and all innocent creatures having life. This new-born tenderness for the innocent and defenceless of God's creatures marks all the poets of that renaissance of the last years of the century. We note it in Cowper and Burns—we note it later in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey—that instinct and resolve

> Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
> With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

And thus it has come about that time, having

separated the true from the spurious sentiment of the last century (time is the true test and the sure one), the "Ode to the Field Mouse" has not lost its savour, and never will.

It is as a song-writer that Burns is best known to many, but it was not, strangely enough, in that character that he first appealed to his readers. The Kilmarnock edition, as I have said, contains but very few songs, and none of first-rate merit. Yet Burns had written six years before (when he was just one-and-twenty) one at least of supreme excellence—indeed one of the world's masterpieces in this kind—a triumph of metrical skill, as it is of tenderness and point, which just stops short of epigram, or any other disturbance of the truth and pathos of the theme :—

O Mary, at thy window be,
It is the wish'd, the trysted hour!
Those smiles and glances let me see
That make the miser's treasure poor;
How blithely wad I bide the stoure,
A weary slave frae sun to sun;
Could I the rich reward secure,
The lovely Mary Morison.

Yestreen when to the trembling string
The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw:
Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,
And yon the toast of a' the toon,
I sighed, and said among them a',
"Ye are na' Mary Morison."

O Mary, canst thou wreck his peace,
Wha for thy sake wad gladly die?
Or canst thou break that heart of his,
Whase only faut is loving thee?
If love for love thou wilt na' gie,
At least be pity to me shown!
A thought ungentle canna' be
The thought of Mary Morison!

This song, one of the earliest, and also one of the most perfect of Burns's effusions of this kind, introduces what, to many readers, is the most engaging feature of his genius. He wrote literally hundreds of such, of very various degrees of merit, for the best are transcendent, unique almost in literature, and others poor and trite and among his failures. Some were prompted by a personal experience, by one and another of those attachments to women which were transient, but not the less real and heartfelt while they lasted; but others were written, not exactly to order (for they were mostly contributed gratuitously to collections of Scottish songs, published by two of his friends at different periods of his life), but constructed upon the basis of some fragments of old Scottish song, in many cases only a single verse, which from their intrinsic beauty or suggestiveness happened to strike his fancy. For in his songs, as much as in his other poetic forms, Burns seemed for the most part to need a starting-point, either in form or substance. Only that then from some such starting-point he proceeded, not *once* but *scores of times*, to produce some

masterpiece of sense, feeling, and music. Sometimes he was touched by a phrase, such as "Auld Lang Syne," already invented by one of his unknown predecessors, and went on to add stanzas of his own to a verse in which it formed the burden or chorus. At one time it was the beauty of some such fragment that attracted him; and he mourned openly (for he was the most generous of critics towards his fellow-workers in his art) that the names of these forgotten poets had died, because they themselves had lacked a "Vates Sacer" to preserve them. At another time it was the very vulgarity or oddity of an old fragment, wedded to some charming melody, that fired him to supply the tune with a worthier accompaniment of verse. One day when the girl who nursed him in his later illnesses (Jessie Lewars) repeated to him an old humorous song, beginning:—

> The robin cam' to the wren's nest
> And keekit in, and keekit in:
> O weel's me on your auld pow
> Wad ye be in, wad ye be in?
> Ye've ne'er get leave to lie without,
> And I within, and I within,
> As lang's I hae an auld clout
> To row ye in, to row ye in!

The tune was pretty and Burns was asked to write pretty words to match, and you know, I am sure, many of you, the inimitable lines he produced:—

O wert thou in the cauld blast,
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee:
Or did misfortune's bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a', to share it a'.

Or were I in the wildest waste,
Sae black and bare, sae black and bare,
The desert were a paradise,
If thou wert there, if thou wert there.
Or were I monarch o' the globe,
Wi' thee to reign, wi' thee to reign,
The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my queen, wad be my queen.

If I began to enlarge upon this theme of Burns as a song-writer, when should I end? I must needs then disturb the due proportions of my lecture. The very mention of the names of a few:—"Ye Banks and Braes"; or "Mary in Heaven"; or "Of a' the airts the wind can blaw," will at once remind you of what his countrymen of all classes, from almost the lowest to the highest, owe to Robert Burns, for filling their homes, and their hearts and memories, with lyric treasures such as these. Were ever simplicity, beauty, and tenderness (and in the last-named quality Burns has surely no rival) so united as in these, and scores of others? I will only quote one in full, rather less familiar than those just named:—

I gaed a waefu' gate yestreen,
A gate, I fear, I'll dearly rue;
I gat my death frae twa sweet een,
Twa lovely een o' bonnie blue.
'Twas not her golden ringlets bright,
Her lips like roses wat wi' dew,
Her heaving bosom, lily white—
It was her een sae bonnie blue.

She talk'd, she smiled, my heart she wil'd,
She charmed my soul, I wist na how;
And aye the stound, the deadly wound,
Cam frae her een sae bonnie blue.
But "spare to speak, and spare to speed";
She'll aiblins listen to my vow;
Should she refuse, I'll lay my dead
To her twa een sae bonnie blue.

Surely a result so exquisite was never by any other man achieved out of material so elementary and so scanty in amount as this! And, indeed, the poem raises the whole question of what the mysterious quality *is* in verse which constitutes supreme excellence, and distinguishes it from all second-rate, however clever and plausible. Burns's songs, in this day when such helpless and aimless critical deliverances are heard all round about us, come in opportunely to remind us that in literature and in art the interval between *first* and *second* rate is practically infinite, while those between second, third, and fourth are comparatively insignificant! And it is only by storing our memories and feeding our tastes and affections on these masters of perfection (whom we call *classics*), and among whom Burns holds a

foremost place, that we shall ever learn to recognise first-rate when we see it, and also second-rate when we see it. But this is a digression, and I dare not digress, for I have yet to commend to you the *artistic* quality of Burns as shown in his humorous, no less than his serious and tender verse. The notion of Burns as a kind of human "skylark," uttering "wood-notes wild," pouring forth strains of "unpremeditated art," is curiously wide of the mark. As I have said, he is *unequal*, as any man must be who wrote so much; but he is almost always the *artist*. He understands form and limits, he understands when to *stop*; his gift of narrative in verse shows this in wonderful degree. As a story-teller in lyric measures he has no equal. Not only by what he says, but by what he omits and reveals only by suggestion, his power is of the rarest. Take the familiar "Duncan Gray," in which Burns's favourite theme of the "falling out" of lovers, and the subsequent "renewal" of their loves, is so exquisitely treated:—

Duncan Gray cam here to woo,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!
On blythe yule night when we were fou,
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!
Maggie coost her head fu' high
Looked asklent and unco skeigh,
Gart poor Duncan stand abeigh;
Ha, ha, the wooing o't!

Duncan fleech'd and Duncan pray'd:
Ha, ha, etc.

Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig,
Ha, ha, etc.
Duncan sigh'd baith out and in,
Grat his een baith bleert and blin',
Spak o' loupin' o'er a linn ;
Ha, ha, etc.

Time and chance are but a tide,
Ha, ha, etc.
Slighted love is sair to bide,
Ha, ha, etc.
Shall I, like a fool, quoth he,
For a haughty hizzie die ?
She may gae to—France for me !
Ha, ha, etc.

How it comes let doctors tell,
Ha, ha, etc.
Meg grew sick—as he grew hale,
Ha, ha, etc.
Something in her bosom wrings,
For relief a sigh she brings ;
And O, her een, they spak sic things !
Ha, ha, etc.

Duncan was a lad o' grace,
Ha, ha, etc.
Maggie's was a piteous case,
Ha, ha, etc.
Duncan could na be her death,
Swelling pity smoor'd his wrath ;
Now they're crouse and canty baith,
Ha, ha, etc.

Or take the opening of " Death and Dr. Hornbook," where he has to tell his story in his own favourite metre, and where, as usual, he introduces one of his own peculiar *diagnoses* of the effects of intoxica-

tion, and no man, unfortunately, had had better opportunities of so doing; or again, take his masterpiece "Tam o' Shanter," composed straight away at a sitting, or rather on a walk, and yet displaying in every line, besides its matchless humour and power, the artistic faculty to which I have referred. The alternations of grave and gay—of comedy and grimmest tragedy; the admirable effect he produces of interspersing the lowland vernacular with English, not now for purely poetic purposes, but to give a grandiose effect to the Homeric similes with which he variegates his theme, combine to make the poem a masterpiece of mock heroic.

Mr. Leslie Stephen has somewhere solemnly observed that criticism on Burns "is only permitted to Scotchmen of pure blood." And this warning, which I entirely agree in, would have been sufficient had I had any wish to do the opposite. But it was never my intention. There is only too much criticism of our great poets in circulation. It is not for those who know and love Robert Burns that I am here to-day, but for those who know Burns by half-a-dozen poems and a score of quotations, and there an end. My other object has been just to indicate for such of my hearers the place that Burns marks in the development of the poetic art in England. Burns stands, as regards the old and the new world of poetry, both in Scotland and in England, at the parting of the ways. He was at once the climax of the

old and the harbinger of the new. He brought to perfection what many of his Scottish predecessors and models had practised with much charm and ability. In the vernacular Scotch song, in the satire, in the familiar epistle, in the dramatic narrative, he rose to a height from which no successor has deposed him, or could depose him. He is the greatest of Scottish poets, but not the last. One other also of consummate genius, but of gifts widely different, was to follow. Walter Scott owed something, I believe, to Burns, but he owed even more, as we shall see, to other fountains of inspiration. As touching the poetry of England, the influence of Burns is perhaps incalculable. More than any one else—more than Thomson, Cowper, or Wordsworth—did he serve to break up the frost that seemed to be settling upon the lyric flow in England at the end of the last century. To him we might apply the first line of Horace's charming ode :—

Solvitur acris hiems grata vice veris et Favoni.

The writer of English poetry was, indeed, on the point of yielding to other and larger influences when Burns first wrote, but he, if any one, brought the "spring" and the "south-west wind" to break up the crusts of inveterate custom. It was Wordsworth, you will remember, who confessed, in one of those touching poems he wrote in Burns's memory, that to him he first owed the momentous opening of the eyes to the fact that a new world

was at hand, and new conquests awaiting the poet.

> He showed my youth
> How verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth.

Not Wordsworth alone (though he eminently) owed this to Burns. The renaissance of poetry early in this century owes this to him, and we who have owed to poetry no small part of our highest education will not grudge him our thoughtful gratitude.

At the same time it cannot be concealed that the taste of this generation shows few signs of returning to the plain, direct, objective simplicity of such as Burns. The poets of to-day that obtain a hearing seem for the most part afraid of the simple and elementary topics, thoughts, feelings, and passions of their kind. They wander away too often *over the head* of the ordinary reader rather than by his side. They deal in riddles and in paradox, in the far-off and the far-fetched—they go in for the cultivated rather than for the spontaneous, for mist rather than for clearness. A story is told of an intrepid aeronaut who, being carried by strong winds through the darkness into unknown countries, found himself, when the dawn of day arrived, over a favourable ground for descent. Ignorant of his whereabouts (it proved to be somewhere in rural Suffolk), and seeing some labourers in the field below, he shouted as he neared the earth, "Where am I?" To

which the very simple villagers, looking up, replied without any hesitation, "*You're in a ballione, sor!*" Even thus is the modern poet too often "in a ballione" as regards the simple, humble tenant of this earth. The comparison may seem to you flippant, but it has a curious parallel in poetry itself. In the beautiful prelude to "Peter Bell" Wordsworth tells us how he, too, was tempted at times to rise in the "little flying ship" above the heads of his readers, and how he rejected the offer, and why. His talent alike and his duty fitted him for humbler functions and other triumphs:—

> Long have I loved what I behold,
> The night that calms, the day that cheers;
> The common growth of mother-earth
> Suffices me—her tears, her mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears.
>
> The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
> I shall not covet for my dower,
> If I along that lowly way
> With sympathetic heart may stray,
> And with a soul of power.

SOME LEADERS IN THE POETIC REVIVAL OF 1760–1820

III

SCOTT

1771–1832

WHETHER or no Walter Scott is much read and genuinely admired at the present day is one of those quasi-literary, half-fashionable questions that furnish diners-out from time to time with a convenient topic of conversation. It is evident that he is a good deal "*bought*," or otherwise publishers, we may presume, would not produce edition after edition, often two or three voluminous ones appearing in the same year. But this is not conclusive. An author is not necessarily much *read* because he is much *purchased*. There are certain standard authors, especially in the drama and in fiction, whose works may be called "furniture" books, and are bought as almost necessary articles of domestic equipment, although, when once bought and on the shelves, they may more properly be

called *fixtures*. I remember in my youth a well-intentioned *nouveau riche* who, having built or bought a fine place in the country, found a room in it called "*library*" which could not be allowed to remain bare of its appropriate contents. He accordingly summoned a bookseller of repute, and commissioned him without delay to furnish the naked shelves. The man naturally replied, "Of what description, sir, do you like your books to be?" to which came the ready reply, "Well, I don't know—but something literary, I suppose." Now with the many who wish to do the right thing at once by themselves, their homes, their families, and public opinion, I suppose the same ingenuous desire exists. If a house is to comprehend a room, or a set of shelves, called a *library*, it should contain "something literary," and of the books beyond question deserving the name Scott is one of the most obvious. A Shakspeare, a Scott, a Tennyson — these are undoubtedly "books that no gentleman's library should be without." There may be found also with these a Ruskin and a Meredith, but these imply an ambition and a culture somewhat in advance of the other.

Scott, then, is certainly *bought*, but there is little evidence that he is read, thought of, or that his influence much affects the general taste of those who buy him. People continue to *buy* Scott, but in the meantime subscribe to Mudie's, and read something quite different—the masterpieces of the hour they live in. But there is yet

another large class, having the courage of their opinions, who will tell you that Scott's day is done, and that other gifts and other messages have supplanted his. I do not notice that these sentiments are generally uttered with that joy of trampling something under foot with which the rising generation of cultured young men and young women announce that they "cannot read" Dickens. The farther distance of Scott from this generation, and the wider scope, the deeper root, of his fame, are sufficient to check the voice of open scorn; and there is doubtless a vein of real, and therefore respectable conviction in many minds that in the scale of later developments of intellect and of art in fiction, Scott is weighed and found wanting, and must therefore be surely, if sadly, shelved (in more than one sense) for the future. It is, happily, with a sorrowful feeling—"How are the mighty fallen!"—rather than with anything of contempt, that this decision is arrived at by many, and, "pity being akin to love," I have no words of resentment to utter against such.

But not only the "prosperity of a jest," but the prosperity of any literary achievement, must live in the ear and heart of the reader, as well as of the writer; and as I am convinced that Pope's couplet is true, and no writer can prosper unless approached by the reader "in the same spirit that the author writ," I am venturing to ask in this lecture how far some of us fail to enjoy Scott, as our grandfathers and grandmothers enjoyed him,

just because we have failed to act upon these maxims, and demanding from Scott something which he was not born to give us, thereby lose the profit of the rare and splendid gifts with which he *was* endowed. For this, I need not say, is at the root of all that spurious self-deceiving criticism everywhere current. "I can read Meredith, and even Thackeray. Scott is not at all like either, *therefore* I cannot read Scott. Therefore Scott appears to me obsolete." Such is the "simple syllogism" that seems so satisfactory, and yet starves our literary sense.

Let us then, admitting that Scott is very different from the idols in fiction worshipped today, examine how Scott came to write novels as he did. Every great writer has his progenitors, and Scott is no exception. Happily, I may take for granted that all my hearers know the general facts of his life, and the order of his works. In a direct line of literary succession Scott is the child of that poetic revival that was in progress (say) from 1760 to 1800. In this revival Percy's *Reliques of English Poetry* (published in 1765) played an important part, and Scott has left on record that when he was a boy there was no book he studied more, and with more pleasure and profit. Then this new-born love of the romantic ballad led him on to hunt out and collect all the like treasures with which the border country between Scotland and England was so rich—the *Mins-*

trelsy of the Scottish Border. Then, in due course, his own native gift and instinct for poetry led him to practise his hand both in the short lyric and in the sustained metrical narrative. His romances in verse began in 1805; the particular metre and method were prompted by a first sight of Coleridge's splendid fragment "Christabel," as Scott himself cheerfully admitted. And there is nothing in that most attractive personality more engaging than the noble modesty of the man, the frankness and genuineness of his recognition of others. He has told us in one of his prefaces to the Waverley Novels how he came to tire, or to fancy that his public would tire, of the vein he had worked in *Marmion*, and the *Lady of the Lake*, and the rest. Byron had risen, a new and exciting poetic force, and at least against that kind of power, and the spell of that temperament, it was not in Scott to contend. It was then that his thoughts turned to prose romance. He had tried his hand years before on such a task and had abandoned it. We all know that most fascinating anecdote in literature of the discovery of the fragment of *Waverley* (supposed to be lost) in the drawer of the old desk where its author was searching for fishing-tackle for a guest in the house. The fragment was read over, the old impulse and the old confidence returned, the story was completed—*Waverley* was published—and the direction of Scott's genius and the triumphs that followed was determined for the remainder of his life.

There were, I believe, three separate converging influences that determined the form and quality of Scott's romances. The one was the direct poetic stimulus and education just pointed to. Another was the influence of a school of prose-romance already existing, of which Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1765) may be regarded as the starting-point. And following it, born of the same growing appetite for the springs of marvel and mystery in the weary pilgrims through the droughty ways of the eighteenth century, came Mrs. Radcliffe, with her *Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Romances of the Forest*, and all the "shockers" which so fascinated and absorbed Catharine Morland and her friend in Miss Austen's delightful story. George Colman the elder neatly packed into a single stanza the essence of the Radcliffian romance :—

> A novel, now, says Will, is nothing more
> Than an old castle, and a creaking door,
> A distant hovel.
> Clanking of chains, a gallery, a light,
> Old armour, and a phantom all in white,
> And there's a novel!

And the spell of this school of romance was a distinct factor in the making of Walter Scott. It was when Mrs. Radcliffe was in the maturity of her powers that Scott conceived (to borrow his own language) the desire to compose "a tale of chivalry, which was to be in the style of the *Castle of Otranto*, with plenty of Border characters and

supernatural incidents." Of such a work Scott actually wrote a portion. The fragment (it was to have been called "Thomas the Rhymer") is in print, first published as a preface to *Waverley* in 1829. But Scott was happily deterred from completing it, and fifteen years elapsed before he again essayed to join the band of writers of fiction. Much had happened in the interval. His love of mediævalism, of the romantic and the adventurous, had not declined, but he had learned better to trust his own resources, his own individuality, and to study the secrets of the true novelist's success in other directions. Miss Edgeworth had "swum into his ken." Her pictures of humble life and manners in Ireland had inspired him with the thought how worthy would be the task of doing something of the kind for the same rank and class among his own countrymen. "If I could but hit Miss Edgeworth's wonderful power of vivifying all her persons, and making them live as beings in your mind, I should not be afraid." So Scott wrote to his friend and publisher, James Ballantyne. And then there was another lady novelist who had risen above the horizon, in her gifts and methods, her culture and her reading, differing from Scott *toto cælo*, and yet who inspired in him the profoundest admiration. In an often-quoted passage he confesses that that young lady had a power of reproducing the *minutiæ* of character and manners in her personages with a fidelity he could only

admire, but could not hope to rival. "I can do," he said, "the big bow-wow [1] style as well as any one, but this of Miss Austen's is denied me." To this "bow-wow" style we must return.

Meantime, just consider with what an equipment Scott came furnished to the task of story-telling. A poet, practised in the taste and in the art alike; a wide, if not profound student of history, and of archæology and heraldry and all the studies subsidiary to history; an omnivorous reader in almost every branch of the *belles lettres* and the drama; a man with as fine a sense of the humorous as ever practised the story-teller's craft; a lover of nature—of scenery and the picturesque—as strong, where the rising school of society novelists were weak, as *he* was weak perhaps where they were strong. What a combination of gifts and accomplishments was here, and with it what invention and resource; what variety, considering the amount he produced, even though the quality thinned and weakened towards the end. Nor are these all the great qualities and faculties that made Scott an all but instantaneous success when *Waverley* came to the world to refresh and fortify the hungry reader—still hungry after what Charles Lamb called "the

[1] [The exact words are:—"That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements of feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The big bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied me."]

innutritious phantoms" of the Minerva Press. Why is it that, after eighty years, the series of fiction that began in such a triumph, and is still regarded as a "classic," is found unreadable, sometimes genuinely, sometimes the reverse, by even the educated fiction-reading public of to-day?

Well, I think that the "big bow-wow" has more than anything else been against Scott's enduring, I do not say "popularity," as much as appreciation by the critical, or *would-be* critical public, in this much-changed and changing age. And I believe that the use of the "bow-wow" (it is his own frank and humorous description, remember) was mainly due to the vast acquaintance Scott had with the English drama, acted and unacted. If he had one affection stronger than another, in the realm of poetical imaginative literature, it was for the drama. From a child he had stored his memory with the plays of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age. He must have known Shakspeare almost by heart. His prose writings, not merely his novels, are steeped in references to Shakspeare's characters, in quotations from him or allusions to him. Even when writing on a purely technical and commercial subject, such as the powers and prerogatives of banking institutions in Scotland (I refer to the letters of "Mungo Malagrowther"), you will find hardly a page without some use made of an incident or passage in Shakspeare! I feel sure indeed that it was mainly Scott who not only set

the fashion of habitually quoting Shakspeare early in this century, but who materially contributed to make Shakspeare familiarly known. Nor was his interest in the drama confined to the Elizabethans. He edited an "ancient" and a "modern" *British Drama*, in six or eight goodly volumes, among the multifarious work done for the booksellers. He even tried writing drama, though without much success. Almost all poets, and many who are not poets, do the same thing, with a like inadequate result. The art of the dramatist is an art by itself, and the greatest of romantic writers, whether in verse or prose, may never possess it. But the dramatic *idea* was always present to Scott's mind. When he wanted an appropriate motto for a new chapter of a novel and could not recall one at the moment, he at once composed one, and nine times out of ten it was, as you know, from a supposititious drama, labelled *Old Play*. Moreover, Scott's intimate acquaintance with the drama was not exclusively that of the student and reader. He knew and loved the *acted* drama. He was contemporary with the great Kemble family and the group of well-trained actors that played with them. He knew his Shakspeare, no doubt, largely from these, but he would know another drama of somewhat inferior kind—the old semi-classical tragedy, with very few lines in it that would now bear quotation, but which were yet quickened into something like life by the genius of a Siddons. Scott had

known what it was to be carried away by such triumphs, and the "heroic" diction of this somewhat unreal atmosphere had for him the charm of early association. And thus, it chanced, I believe, that when Scott came to construct prose romance, while in his dealing with the characters and manners of his humbler countrymen, which he knew so thoroughly, because from his youth he had made them his companions and friends in his country home and in his rambles through the Border country, while, I say, in his dealings with such, he drew from the life—following the fine precedent of Fielding and Smollett as well as his contemporary, Miss Edgeworth; when he came to the characters of higher life, and where the affections and passions and ambitions of men and women were to be acted out upon a loftier stage, he turned, I believe, unconsciously to the stage (in another sense). In portraying a Bailie Nicol Jarvie, an Oldbuck, a Mucklebackit, an Edie Ochiltree, an Andrew Fairservice, he drew upon his memory and his observation. When he came to his heroes and heroines—his kings and queens, his warriors, his females in distress—he was not, indeed (far from it), *untrue* to the primal facts of human nature, but he clothed these characters, by way of giving them dignity and distinction, with a language which is often curiously in the conventional vein of the tragic or sentimental drama of his day. Mr. Puff, in the *Critic*, as you will remember, remarked that it was not

his way to make "slavish distinctions," and give the fine language only to the upper classes. But this is very much what Scott did, and what he had largely been accustomed to in the drama of his day. And I think this was what he meant by talking of the "big bow-wow" manner, and what deters so many critics in these days, when the romantic manner has so wholly changed and new canons of taste are in operation, from adapting themselves to the dramatic vein of Scott.

If I may be allowed a short digression, I would point to a comparison in this respect between Scott and another great humourist and novelist of this century, who in other respects differs widely from him—I mean Charles Dickens. When Dickens began his astounding career as a writer of stories, he too, like Scott, started from a close acquaintance with the great novelists and essayists of the previous century—Fielding, Smollett, Goldsmith, Addison, and the like. But outside this school of writers Dickens's literary range (unlike Scott's) was not large. He was, through the poverty of his up-bringing, not a liberally educated man. Scott came to his task with mind and memory stored with a variety of reading at the command of very few men, and hence his taste is rarely, if ever, at fault. But Dickens, so different in this, was (again like Scott) a passionate lover of the drama—notably the acted drama,—and the consequence was that as long as a story was, like *Pickwick*, almost purely humorous and, moreover,

had no *plot*—was in the main a mere sequence of events and incidents—Dickens only evinced his strong points, his almost matchless drollery and observation of life. But as soon as ever, in the books that followed — *Nicholas Nickleby*, for instance, and *Oliver Twist*—it became necessary to have a plot, something involving complexity, with elements of tragedy and sentiment in it, the influence upon Dickens of the drama (and very largely of the transpontine drama) became apparent. The story of Ralph Nickleby and Smike, of Monk and Oliver Twist, are melodrama, and not very good melodrama. Dickens, while he dearly loved the stage and all things belonging to it, knew the weak side of it—its foibles and conventionalities and traditions—as no man ever knew or drew them before. But none the less was the "idea" of the drama ever before him, and determined his method of handling certain themes and situations. And because Dickens lacked a thousand gifts and attainments that Scott possessed, the defects of taste and of art are of course correspondingly great and irritating.

But to return to Scott. The fact that he had before him so often, as I conceive, the recollections of his dramatic ideals, involves more than the fact that it led him to invent dialogue that was sometimes more literary than lifelike. The idea of the drama, if present to a writer of romance, consciously or unconsciously affects his

treatment of the larger passions and sentiments of his characters. There is a convenient French phrase, the "optique du théâtre," which may be explained as the particular treatment which not only the scenery but the very gestures and the language of the characters in a drama require, in order to produce their designed effect upon the spectator. This, arising of course from the large stage and the distance from the eye of the spectator, we are all familiar with in the case of scenery. An elaborate stage landscape seen from the boxes appears a perfect and exquisite transcription of nature. You go behind the scenes and approach the same work of art and you are astonished at the rudeness and coarseness of the painting—made up of smears and splashes. Some of our most notable painters—a Roberts and a Stanfield—worked for a great part of their lives in both occupations. But if we could pass directly from the beautiful scenery painted by the latter for *Acis and Galatea* to his pathetic picture (we all know so well) of the "Abandoned" wreck, we should recognise at once probably that Stanfield was no less of an artist in one instance than the other, only that in the one case he knew that his painting was to be seen from (say) fifty yards off, and in the other from a yard and a half! and he laid on his lines and his colours accordingly. Thus, also (I believe), there is an "optique du théâtre" in prose romance, and Scott, in the more highly pitched scenes and

characters of his novels, used the method of the theatre, the condition of which is that he must not be looked at too closely. And I venture to think that this method was used by him—true poet, humourist, and man of the world as he was—hoping, and not hoping in vain, as regarded at least his contemporaries, that his readers would accept this method, and adapt the focus of their own point of view accordingly. I think he recognised that there is some kind of character-painting that needs to be looked at from a distance, and another kind that admits of being held almost close to the eye. He saw and genuinely admired the rare gifts of Miss Austen, her "exquisite touch," as he said, "which renders commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of their description." If I remember rightly, Miss Austen herself speaks of her work as that of a "miniature painter," and of herself as minutely filling in her two square inches of ivory. To this method Scott made no pretence. He envied the power, and there was no occasion, for it is one's own gift, not the absence of some one else's, that determines our services to art, as they do our services to our kind.

Of course, however, one objection to trusting to the "optique du théâtre" in fiction lies in this, that as Scott passed from one class of incident and character to another the focus had continually to be changed. He wrote under the spell of so many determinant influences that at

one moment he was writing his old romances (only this time in prose); at another he remembered a Siddons and a Kean, their very voices and their looks; at another, again, he was drawing from close observation of middle-class real life and his humble friends, and with the humourist's boundless enjoyment of their wit and humour, their shrewdness, and their "canniness." The reader has, indeed, to hold the book at different distances from his eye as he passes from one to the other. But I think Scott expected, and in the main was justified in expecting, from his readers a certain measure of sympathetic imagination responding to his own. He trusted that every reader would bring something to the reading, with a view to his enjoyment. It is because in these latter days readers expect everything to be done for them, and to give nothing in return, that our criticisms upon past masters of the literary world seem so often to miss their mark.

To pass from the general to the particular, let us remind ourselves of one of the most famous and popular, as surely it is one of the greatest of the Waverley series—I mean *Rob Roy*. There is as much variety in this work as in any of the purely Scottish novels. Think of the names that spring to the memory at the sound of its title—not first or chiefly, perhaps, the hero and his wife, but the Osbaldistone family, Mr. Owen, the Bailie Nicol Jarvie, Andrew Fairservice, the "Dougal

Creature," and last, but most surely not least, Diana Vernon, most winning, most lovable of all Scott's heroines—to love whom, indeed, as was once said of some one very different, is "a liberal education." Think of the wide stretches of country (and what country!) covered in this enchanting romance. Think of the new and fresh and exhilarating effect upon the readers of the year 1818 (the romance was the fourth in order from *Waverley*) of this outdoor, breezy, health-breathing life, after the dull and stale conventionalities of the Minerva Press; and if one traverses wide stretches of *country* in the book, so one does of *human character and speech.* It is a far cry, indeed, from Andrew Fairservice to Helen MacGregor or to Rashleigh Osbaldistone, and we must needs contemplate them from unequal distances. We seem in a different sphere of life and art, somehow, when we recall the astute gardener at the Hall begging Frank Osbaldistone's interest to get him a new situation where "he wad hear pure doctrine, and where there was no leddy about the place to count the apples"; and pass from this to Rashleigh, who is indeed rather too "steep" (as Mr. A. Lang would say), too much i' the vein of Edward Fitzball and the Surrey Theatre. So also may be, for modern taste, the outlaw, with "his foot upon his native heath, his name MacGregor"; but I think adverse criticism of Scott generally nowadays fixes upon his heroes and heroines as his weakest spot, and where he may most safely be disparaged

in comparison with his successors. Well, Frank Osbaldistone is, technically, rather than Rob Roy, the hero of the story. He appears earliest upon the scene, and the story ends with his marrying the heroine. I admit the charge that this character is absolutely colourless. But then, by a method known to lawyers as a "demurrer," while I admit the charge, I retort, "What then?" Was it necessary for the conduct of the story, the purpose of the writer, or the enjoyment of the reader, that the particular character *should* be made any more individual, any *less shadowy*, than it is? I submit that it was *not* necessary, and that the criticism is irrelevant.

There is nothing so easy and, I venture to think, so fallacious as what I would call "criticism by sampling." Scott, as a novelist, is nowadays very much on his trial. Other romancers and novelists, dealing with Scottish life and manners past and present, have risen among us, and it was inevitable perhaps that comparisons or contrasts should be prevalent. Scott is, indeed, a name still revered as a classic, and yet when faint and timorous whispers were at first heard suggesting "this or that new story-teller is really a great advance upon Scott," others, one by one, concurred, and now it is openly, without any bashfulness, alleged in many quarters that Scott has been surpassed even on his own ground. But the methods by which this decision is arrived at seem to partake of what I have just called "sampling."

An admitted weak point in the elder writer is called into court, and a strong point in the later one is put side by side with it, and the cry goes up to the cultured heavens, "Behold, how inferior is this 'weak side' to this 'strong one'"; "behold, how inferior is Walter Scott to Mr. A. or Mr. B.!" Foremost among such judgments against Scott is the verdict on his style, and this is worth a few moments' consideration. Style — the ordinary *narrative, descriptive* style of Scott — can very easily be found fault with, if by style is meant a mode of writing carefully devised and elaborated. Scott had no such style. He wrote far too quickly and far too much for him to think of such things; and accordingly his style is not only devoid of artistic premeditation, but it is often slovenly, and now and then even ungrammatical. The veriest neophyte in writing English—any well-instructed sixth-form boy—could make merry over it. And while we admit all this, there rings in our ears, by way of warning, the stern voice of Buffon, who first said that "the style is the man"!—"Le style c'est de l'homme." But I am not afraid of seeming to speak disrespectfully of dignities in challenging the application of this famous saying in the case of Scott. For it really comes to *this*: what did Buffon mean by "style"? Did he mean a carefully concocted method of writing, adopted by a writer in order to difference himself from other men? For that is really what "style" comes to, as often practised or sought after. A young and

new writer desires above all things that he should attract at the outset by his *style*. He wishes—it is a harmless and natural desire—to have the credit of *individuality*. He thinks style will give him this, and he seeks to master a style that will impress. Sometimes, indeed, a new writer, mistrustful of his own power to be original, seeks to win laurels by imitating authors already popular. Thus a Macaulay and a Carlyle called into existence a whole brood of young disciples, who sought to borrow their artifices in writing and to reproduce their manner. In the same way Tennyson was answerable (quite innocently) for all those who, having bought a packet of his particular seed, sought to raise the same kind of bloom. But this nowadays is recognised to be a cheap and second-hand sort of proceeding, and accordingly what the cookery-books used to call "another way" is resorted to. Instead of adopting a style like that of some one distinguished predecessor, let us adopt a style (our young men seem to say) as unlike as possible to anything ever used before. Instead of a style used by *somebody*, we will invent a style used by *nobody*. And many a young author has tried this last plan, and has often met with a most encouraging reception from the critics on his first appearance on the strength of it.

Now, I would ask, when Buffon uttered his saying, "The style is the man," did he point to anything like this?—did he refer to a man either *imitating*, or labouring *not to imitate*, any other

writer? I am sure he did not; he meant "style," where the writer forgets both one and the other ambition, but, writing unconsciously, reveals therein his own individuality, with all its strength and with all its weakness. There is something (as the great Frenchman would have been the first to avow) greater than style. It is the individual *at the back of the style* which concerns us, and so far as that individuality attracts or repels, to that degree will the writing in question charm us, or the reverse!

And it is the felt presence of such individuality in the case of Scott that (I submit) constitutes the charm of what may still be called his "style." Take any exception you like (and there are many possible) to his literary English, and the charm is unaffected. "Shatter" the style "as you will," but the charm of the man—his mind, his nature, his tastes, his education, all that constitutes a "personality"—clings to it still. And this is why it cannot be sound criticism to contrast two men on the strength of the English that they write. For the verdict of the true manhood and womanhood of England will ultimately rest upon qualities not to be identified with the skill and elaboration of the written word. And thus it is that in our efforts to give Scott his true place in literature, or to account for his fame, it does not do to try him by tests *that are no tests.* It is of no avail or profit to take a square inch, or a square foot, or even a square mile of him, and begin

comparing the sample with even a corresponding "sample" in some one else. I always think that Dick Swiveller's observation, in reply to the little "Marchioness," that beer *cannot* be "tasted in a sip," is of wide literary application. Walter Scott cannot be tasted and cannot be judged "in a sip." But take him as a *whole*, if you will, and compare him with the supposed rival *as a whole*. Or take any single romance of his as a whole and compare it with a corresponding romance of some one else's as a whole, and you are something nearer to understanding wherein Scott's overwhelming greatness consists. This novel of *Rob Roy*, for instance, is surely a representative one in the splendid series of the Scottish romances. It stands, perhaps with some half-dozen others, among Scott's acknowledged masterpieces. It is yet one more proof of Scott's supremacy that, of any half-a-dozen persons consulted, each would name a different one as his favourite. But I am hardly wrong in naming from among the purely Scottish stories *Rob Roy*, *Guy Mannering*, *Old Mortality*, the *Antiquary*, the *Heart of Midlothian*, the *Bride of Lammermoor*, as those that we should agree to as the most powerful, characteristic, and memory-haunting of his novels. The very names of these stories have (to borrow Charles Lamb's expression) "a perfume in the mention." But the stories themselves have this "perfume," and that a perfume which never fades; they are like some magic *pot-pourri*, the flavour of which is brought back to us on the

instant when we recall the characters and the situations. Keeping still to our first choice, *Rob Roy*, I suppose there is no one of the series to which more of all sorts of exceptions might not be taken as to the inartistic qualities of the plot, the improbabilities, the occasional "high-falutin," the occasional melodrama, the shadowiness of certain characters, and a dozen objections more, equally well founded.

We will agree to all this, and yet again we exclaim, "What then?" These flaws and blemishes, which to some of us seem hopelessly repellent, to the majority of healthy-minded readers are as nothing by the side of the indefeasible charm of the story, the attractiveness of its leading characters, the pathos, the romantic touch, the transcendent humour. Those who have once come under its spell desire to renew again and again the experience, and a slight indisposition or other enforced justification for rest and idleness is almost welcomed as finding ample compensation in the opportunity of reading yet once more this and others of its companions. Does this really count for nothing in the art and mystery of criticism? Is this really no proof of high excellence, and the place of its author in the roll of literature? Can we seriously hesitate as to the answer? The element of *permanence*, of the charm of any writing enduring beyond the fashion and taste of a day, is surely one of the first elements in the constitution of what we call a *classic*. A classic is a work

which has the quality of *survival.* And I am, of course, aware that those who back some quite new favourite in the race against Walter Scott cannot, from the nature of the case, apply this test to their own candidate. But the test is not absolutely necessary. Those others that I have sought to indicate are with us to apply. The "happy-making" quality which those who love him find in him, is it not all but unique in a British writer of romance—"happy-making," so utterly different a quality from the pleasure excited by literary style, or cleverness of plot, the excitement of some new and surprising sensation, or even academic loftiness of sentiment and high social purpose. We turn again and again to that which in its treatment of human nature draws us to certain persons, quickening in us, through their example, love, and sympathy, and admiration—which things, together with "hope," says Wordsworth, are the things by which we live. *Heroine-drawing* is not usually considered Scott's *forte*; but again I ask, who can recall the character and the fortunes of Diana Vernon—the personality of the creation, impressed upon us even in despite of the occasional tragedy-language put into her mouth, and the abnormal and unusual situations into which the plot leads her—without feeling that in one other author alone (need I say I mean Shakspeare?) can we look for a parallel success, a parallel triumph? Thomas Carlyle often said unfortunate things—things which had

better been "left unsaid,"—but never, I think, one *more* infelicitous and more misleading than when he ventured the judgment that Shakspeare drew his characters "from the heart outwards," and that Scott drew them "from the costumes inwards." If this were approximately true of any class of Scott's innumerable creations, it would be of his heroes and heroines; but certainly it is no more true of Diana Vernon than it is of the Bailie himself!

Very early, as you are aware, in the career of the Waverley Novels, the stories were seized upon by the playmakers of the day and turned into dramas—in many cases, if not all, into melodramas, in the original sense of that word, which was of a drama intermingled with music, after the fashion of that epoch. The first of the novels thus "operated upon" was *Guy Mannering*, which was produced in London in 1816, with music by the eminent composer Henry Bishop. The man of letters who arranged the libretto was Scott's friend Daniel Terry (Scott used, you remember, to joke about his stories as being "Terry-fied"), and though Scott pleasantly affected to be an unwilling recipient of the compliment, he clearly did not seriously resent the tribute paid him, for Lockhart tells us that Scott even assisted his friend in the process of adaptation, and wrote up certain portions of the dialogue. He even contributed a charming lyric, "Oh slumber, my Darling, thy Sire is a Knight," so that he could

not have been seriously angry. And, indeed, Scott, with his fine eye for all things dramatic and theatrical, must have seen at once how in the skeletons, so to speak, of many of his stories there were great capabilities for effectiveness on the stage. Here, again, I venture to think, the parallel with Dickens comes in, and for the same reasons as I have already indicated. All Dickens's early novels were seized upon in like manner for conversion into plays, and, as in the case of Scott, not, I think, merely to take advantage of the enormous popularity of the novels treated, but because, although much that was most distinctively Dickens inevitably disappeared in the process, the residuum consisted often of effects which are essentially intelligible and impressive on the stage. So it was at least with Scott. After the *Guy Mannering* experiment had proved successful —with such opportunities as it gave for a clever actress in Meg Merrilies, and a comic genius (such as Liston) in Dominie Sampson—the rest of the Scottish novels underwent the same treatment. Not Terry alone, but other skilful playwrights of the day—Pocock, Dibdin, Fitzball—took part in it, no doubt with varying degrees of success, according to the varying adaptability of the novels, but in some cases with marked and enduring results.

It was my good fortune some dozen years since, the year of the first Edinburgh Exhibition, to witness a performance of *Rob Roy* in the chief

theatre of that great metropolis. It is well known that the pre-eminent success of this dramatic version of Scott was due in the first instance to the inimitable performance of the Bailie Nicol Jarvie by the famous actor William Mackay, and I take it that the continued popularity of this special play down to the present hour is due to the fame of this particular character, and to the traditions of the actor's art and craft as to its representation which have been handed on from one actor to another during the last seventy years. Most assuredly when I saw it the really exhilarating feature of the whole performance was the rendering of the part by a comedian whose very name I forget. Indeed so much of the original comedy was preserved in the play that it could hardly fail to be delightful. But the stage dialogue thought necessary for kings and chieftains in 1817 or thereabouts falls but ludicrously on the ear in 1898, and it must be confessed that Rob Roy and Helen MacGregor in the drama are but painfully suggestive of Mr. and Mrs. Crummles. It is possible, indeed, that changes in the estimate of Scott's value as a painter of life that this generation has witnessed have been brought about by the stage treatment and the stage accentuation of such elements in his dialogue as gave some countenance to the charge of being theatrical, or at least melodramatic.

Perhaps, after all, when a *big* man is dramatised by a *little* one, the main success, if achieved,

will be found to lie in the memories that it conjures up of the original, and it is so with the serious interest of Scott's novels when dramatised. It must be admitted that Diana Vernon and Frank Osbaldistone suffer severely in their treatment in the play before us. When they appear upon the scene, and immediately begin singing a duet; when Osbaldistone, on "the rocks, near Aberfoil," begins: "I fear I have dismissed my guide too early. Every step I have taken since his departure renders my way to Aberfoil more intricate. The twilight darkens rapidly, and each succeeding moment the surrounding objects wear a different feature, changeful as my fortunes," and then proceeds to sing (like a tenor in an English opera)—

> O! life is like a summer flower,
> Blooming but to wither;
> O! love is like an April hour,
> Tears and smiles together—

why, I say, the reputation of Scott rather gains than loses by the treatment, for the parody, as it were, sends us back rejoicing to the original, the language of which, by comparison with the acting version, seems the very language of real life. The inimitable scenes in which the Glasgow Bailie finds himself in the uncongenial society of military circles in the Highlands fare much better in the play, for the original dialogue, or some of it, survives, and there is little attempt

by the playwright to improve that which is absolutely unimprovable.

I am aware that I lay myself open to the remark that I proposed in these lectures to treat of poets and poetry, and that as yet I have said nothing of the poetry of Scott in its influence upon that art in the future, or of its place in the literature of the time, and that I have dealt only with his prose. But the fact is that in the case of Scott it is impossible to separate his romances in prose from his romances in verse in estimating that influence. Or rather it must be said that his place in the great revolution of the first quarter of this century was due even more to *Waverley* and its successors than to the poetry that preceded them. It was his prose romances that sent a thrill and a wave of inspiration through all Europe. It was from Germany that the romantic impulse had first come to Scott —from Bürger, whose romantic legends Scott had begun his career with translating, and thus setting in circulation. But there is nothing more interesting and instructive in the study of literature than the way in which the torch is alternately lighted and handed on through the confederacy of nations. It was the English ballads in Percy's *Reliques* that first fired the German Bürger. Then from Germany the torch was handed back to Coleridge and to Scott, and then, through these again, went abroad to help the reaction in France against a worn-out classicism, and to inspire a Dumas and

a Hugo. But in his own country Scott was the magician—the "Wizard," indeed, of the North—who first separated the romantic from the supernatural and the mystical, and made it touch earth and illuminate its common growth, "its humblest mirth and tears." But I am far from saying this in disparagement of Scott's verse. It is quite true that our taste for romantic-historical stories told in metre has passed away, and that we no longer, to our children's great loss, feed their imaginations and their hearts early with the delicious and haunting cadences of the *Lay* or *Marmion*; but this hardly affects the question. It is common even, I believe, to question Scott's title to be a poet of eminence at all; and perhaps those who accept this view have never read, or have long forgotten, certain stanzas which should, I think, decide the question once for all:—

Ah! County Guy, the hour is nigh,
The sun has left the lea,
The orange flower perfumes the bower,
The breeze is on the sea.
The lark, his lay who trilled all day,
Sits hushed his partner nigh;
Breeze, bird, and flower confess the hour,
But where is County Guy?

The village maid steals through the shade,
Her shepherd's suit to hear;
To beauty shy, by lattice high,
Sings high-born cavalier.

The star of love, all stars above,
Now reigns o'er earth and sky;
And high and low the influence know—
But where is County Guy?

If this does not place its author in the first rank of romantic lyrists, what canons of literature can we be following? And what are we to say of such fragments as he threw off, now and again, on the spur of the moment to make a motto for a chapter?—

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
To all the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name!

What is the secret of the *first-rate*, which is separated by such an infinite gulf from the *second-rate*? What is it that, after all deductions that the microscopic eye and the fastidious taste can suggest, keeps a writer like Scott in his place among the really great poets and creative artists of the world? Why is it that, all allowance made for defective art, for theatricalism, and the like, his fame stands practically unaffected with the multitude? Well, this last word suggests a reason, though it does not provide us with a definition. The great men address great *multitudes*. They do not write for a clique, despising the crowd. They do not write for a clique, and therefore they do not perish with the clique. The writer who is human, and who writes for the human, is the man who alone will live. Shak-

speare and Scott, Burns and Wordsworth and Tennyson, unlike as they are in all else, are alike in this, and can never die.

And one likes to remember how the really great ones in our literature, different in so much (for one genius differs from another genius in *kind*, not in degree), know one another, and are thankful for one another. Scott had his weaknesses, and one at least led to that mighty downfall which he gave his subsequent life to repair. But of the jealousies of the little world he knew nothing. How touching was his life-long admiration for Wordsworth, whose poetic point of view might have been thought all but unintelligible to him. I know no passage in all fiction more tender and beautiful than that in which the Antiquary confides to his young friend Lovell why he does not often visit one particular room at Monkbarns (*Antiquary*, chapter x.): . . . "I cannot but be touched with the feeling so beautifully expressed in a poem which I have heard repeated :—

> "My eyes are dim with childish tears,
> My heart is idly stirred.
> For the same sound is in my ears,
> Which in those days I heard.
>
> Thus fares it still in our decay,
> And yet the wiser mind
> Mourns less for what time takes away
> Than what he leaves behind."

And nobly and faithfully did Wordsworth return

such loyalty. Who can ever forget that last visit of Wordsworth and his daughter to Abbotsford, on the eve of Scott's visit to Naples in the vain hope that the climate and the "sweet idleness" of the South might prolong a life worn out with toil and sorrow. They had been all together to visit once again Newark Castle and the Yarrow; and Wordsworth writes: "On our return in the afternoon we had to cross the Tweed directly opposite Abbotsford. The wheels of our carriage grated upon the pebbles in the bed of the stream that there flows somewhat rapidly; a rich but sad light, of rather a purple than a golden hue, was spread over the Eildon Hills at that moment, and thinking it probable that it might be the last time Sir Walter would cross the stream, I was not a little moved, and expressed some of my feelings in the sonnet:—

"A trouble, not of clouds, or weeping rain,
Nor of the setting sun's pathetic light
Engendered, hangs o'er Eildon's triple height:
Spirits of Power, assembled there, complain
For kindred Power, departing from their sight;
While Tweed, best pleased in chanting a blithe strain,
Saddens his voice again, and yet again.
Lift up your hearts, ye Mourners! for the might
Of the whole world's good wishes with him goes;
Blessings and prayers, in nobler retinue
Than sceptred king or laurelled conqueror knows
Follow this wondrous Potentate. Be true,
Ye winds of ocean, and the midland sea,
Wafting your Charge to soft Parthenope!"

So is it, let us be thankful, that the great spirits

of our literature, who stand with heads far above the fleeting mists of earth, not often fail to recognise kindred greatness. As "deep answers unto deep," so "height answers unto height," and the mighty ones who tower above the crowd know one another from afar, and are not deceived.

MRS. BARBAULD

THERE is no need to tell once again at length the life-story of the eminent lady who lived so many years in Hampstead, and will always be one of its most justly honoured memories. Her niece, Miss Lucy Aikin, her great-niece, Mrs. Le Breton, and others, not forgetting Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, have done worthy service in preserving her reputation and her many claims to our admiration and respect. We all remember that she was the daughter of Dr. John Aikin, who was master of a nonconformist academy at Warrington; that her father gave her a classical education as well as making her mistress of modern languages; but that so modest was she as to her acquirements, that it was not till she was thirty years of age, in 1773, that she printed a volume of poems, and in the same year a joint volume of essays with her brother, John Aikin. In 1774 Anna Letitia married a gentleman of French extraction, a Mr. Rochemont Barbauld, son of a clergyman of the Church of England, who, however, having been placed by his father as a pupil at the Warrington academy,

"imbibed presbyterian opinions," and ultimately became a unitarian minister. The Barbaulds went to live in Suffolk, and established a school in the village of Palgrave, which prospered exceedingly, and where Mrs. Barbauld wrote and published her once popular *Hymns in Prose for Children.* The school, after eleven years of profitable success, was discontinued, and the Barbaulds, after a year's foreign travel and a year in London, settled in Hampstead, where Mr. Barbauld took pupils, and became minister of the Chapel on Rosslyn Hill, since rebuilt.

Mrs. Barbauld's first impression of the beauty of her new surroundings, then pure country, is surely not to be omitted here. It is thus she writes to her brother, then resident at Stoke Newington :—

Hampstead is certainly the pleasantest village about London. The mall of the place, a kind of terrace, which they call *Prospect Walk*, commands a most extensive and varied view over Middlesex and Berkshire, in which is included, besides many inferior places, the majestic Windsor and lofty Harrow, which last is so conspicuously placed that you know King James called it "God's visible Church upon Earth." Hampstead and Highgate are mutually objects to each other, and the road between them is delightfully pleasant, lying along Lord Mansfield's fine woods, and the Earl of Southampton's *ferme ornée.* Lady Mansfield and Lady Southampton, I am told, are both admirable dairy-women, and so jealous of each other's fame in that particular, that they have had many heart burnings, and

have, once or twice, been very near a serious falling-out, over the dispute which of them could make the greatest quantity of butter from such a number of cows. On observing the beautiful smoothness of the turf in some of the fields about this place, I was told, the gentleman to whom they belonged had them rolled like a garden plot.

As we have no house, we are not visited, except by those with whom we have connexions, but, few as they are, they have filled our time with a continual round of company, we have not been six days alone. This is a matter I do not altogether wish, for they make very long tea-drinking afternoons, and a whole long afternoon is really a piece of life. However, they are very kind and civil. I am trying to get a little company in a more improving way, and have made a party with a young lady to read Italian together.

I pity the young ladies of Hampstead; there are several very agreeable ones. One gentleman has five tall marriageable daughters, and not a single young man is to be seen in the place, but of widows and old maids such a plenty.

"The Village of Hampstead," Mrs. Le Breton adds, "was then even more secluded than its distance from town seemed to warrant; the hill apparently being considered almost inaccessible." In a diary kept by Mr. Barbauld, he frequently speaks of being prevented from going to town by the state of the roads; and the passengers by the stage coach were always required to walk up the hill. Mrs. Barbauld in a letter to Dr. Aikin describes the house they afterwards took as "standing in the high road at the entrance of

the village quite surrounded by fields." Mrs. Le Breton, writing in 1874, refers to the house as still standing — "the one immediately above Rosslyn Terrace," but I do not know if it has survived another quarter of a century.

During the years at Hampstead, Mrs. Barbauld collaborated with her brother, Dr. Aikin, in the once popular *Evenings at Home.* The work appeared in successive volumes, six in number, between 1792 and 1795. Out of the ninety-nine stories, allegories, dialogues, and schoolroom dramas, contained in the work, only fourteen were contributed by Mrs. Barbauld, and these have not perhaps attained such distinction as some by her brother. "Eyes and no Eyes," the most famous of them all, was his, and the "Transmigrations of Indur." On the other hand, the lady wrote "The Little Philosopher," and the two dramatic scenes, dealing with Alfred the Great in the neatherd's cottage, and King Canute rebuking the flattery of his courtiers. How well does the present writer recall the feeding of his nascent histrionic ambitions in the title-roles of these two engaging dramas; and how the relentless ocean was represented by a large blue dust-cloth, beneath which two other denizens of the nursery persistently rolled to produce the effect of the stormy billows.

The book seems to be neglected by the present generation of young people and their parents. But it remains a classic, by virtue of the presence

in it of a poetic imagination, quite distinct from that gift of invention which enabled Maria Edgeworth to construct the admirable stories in the *Parent's Assistant.* Miss Edgeworth abounds in moral good sense; but the Aikins have a way of striking a child's moral imagination which had no counterpart in the rival caterers for the nursery of their day. It was Dr. Aikin, I think, and not his sister, who told of the little girl and her mother walking through the city on a Sunday morning, when the Anglican was coming out of his church, the Quaker out of his meeting-house, the Wesleyan and the Baptist out of their respective chapels. "See, my girl," is the mother's remark, "how mankind differ!" By and by, a poor wayfarer is struck down with a fit in the open street. The Churchman takes his head in his lap, the Dissenter fetches a doctor, the Friend administers remedies, and all are alike keen to succour the distressed. "See, my child," is the mother's second comment, "how mankind agree."

If these admirable sketches are forgotten, and the prose hymns no longer in vogue, there is still a certainty that Mrs. Barbauld's name will endure as a poetess, though it be, with many a reader, on the strength of a single poem. Her poetical gift was remarkable; but she shared the fate of all but the supreme poetical masters in the renaissance of the end of the eighteenth and opening of the nineteenth century, in that she was hampered by the traditions and the example of

the school that was passing away. She had style, and a fine sense of metrical charm, but too often she could not disengage herself from the bias of certain poets whom she admired. Especially was she fascinated by Collins, whose poems she edited; and one of her own poems, the "Ode to Spring," is closely modelled in metre and style, and even in treatment, on the famous "Ode to Evening." But when she succeeded in breaking away from the old metres and the old diction, in which thought had so long been cramped, she showed that distinction and individuality which give poetry a right to live. We all know the concluding lines of her poem called "Life." The poem has for motto the first line of the famous apostrophe to the soul, attributed to the Emperor Hadrian, "Animula, vagula, blandula," known up to Mrs. Barbauld's time chiefly by Pope's tawdry and theatrical paraphrase, "Vital spark of Heavenly Flame." Mrs. Barbauld treats it in far nobler and worthier fashion. The fate of her now famous verses has been peculiar. They have survived on the strength of the concluding stanza or strophe, which is cited in most modern anthologies as if it were the whole poem. But the introductory and larger portion is in every way worthy of it, and, moreover, separated from their context the last lines lose their significance, so that I make no apology for giving the poem in its entirety :—

> Life ! I know not what thou art,
> But know that thou and I must part ;

And when, or how, or where we met,
I own to me's a secret yet.
But this I know, when thou art fled,
Where'er they lay these limbs, this head,
No clod so valueless shall be,
As all that then remains of me.
O whither, whither dost thou fly,
Where bend unseen thy trackless course,
And in this strange divorce,
Ah, tell where I must seek this compound I?

To the vast ocean of empyreal flame,
From whence thy essence came,
Dost thou thy flight pursue, when freed
From matter's base encumbering weed?
Or dost thou, hid from sight,
Wait, like some spell-bound knight,
Through blank oblivious years th' appointed hour,
To break thy trance and reassume thy power?
Yet canst thou without thought or feeling be?
O say what art thou, when no more thou'rt thee.

Life! We've been long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;
Then steal away, give little warning,
Choose thine own time;
Say not Good-night, but in some brighter clime
Bid me Good-morning.

Readers of Crabb Robinson's *Diary* will recall the interesting anecdote connecting Mrs. Barbauld's name with Wordsworth. Speaking of her collected works, published after her death by her niece, Crabb Robinson adds, "Among the poems is a stanza on Life, written in extreme old age. It

had delighted my sister, to whom I repeated it on her deathbed. It was long after I gave these works to Miss Wordsworth that her brother said, 'Repeat me that stanza by Mrs. Barbauld.' I did so. He made me repeat it again. And so he learned it by heart. He was at the time walking in his sitting-room at Rydal, with his hands behind him, and I heard him mutter to himself, 'I am not in the habit of grudging people their good things, but I wish I had written those lines.'"

The fame of this particular ode was posthumous. The only one of her poems that attracted wide attention in her lifetime was the once much discussed poem, entitled "1811," in which the writer was impelled by what seemed the forlorn condition of England, to despair of the future fortunes of her country and predict its ruin. It was indeed a dark hour the nation was passing through in the great struggle with Napoleon. Things were looking bad in the Peninsula, and Napoleon's efforts to isolate England, by what was called the continental system, seemed nearest to success. Moreover, Mrs. Barbauld believed—as to which she was a true prophet—in the future greatness of the United States. She believed, with Bishop Berkeley, from whom indeed she may have drawn her inspiration, that

> Westward the course of Empire takes its way,

and though she trusted still in the final predominance of an English-speaking nation, it

was to be one from another hemisphere. Mrs. Barbauld was no "little Englander." It was no "craven fear of being great" that prompted her misgivings. Her admiration and affection for her country are read through every line of her prophetic despondency. It was rather a feminine timidity, and that natural horror of bloodshed which affects many persons when war has been long in progress, and overcomes the healthier conviction that a struggle for the world's good is best for a nation whether the end be success or failure. There was an element also, no doubt, of political antipathy in the lines, which accounted for the fierceness with which she was attacked by the Party organs on the other side. The *Quarterly Review* treated her with the characteristic insolence that marked that early stage of literary warfare, and caused her great and enduring pain. But no great harm followed her predictions. Their most noteworthy outcome was the curious incident that Macaulay, in reviewing Ranke's *History of the Popes*, predicted that the Roman Catholic Church showed so little sign of decay, that it would or might still exist "in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall in the midst of a vast solitude take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's." Macaulay's Essay was written nearly thirty years later than Mrs. Barbauld's poem, and there can be no doubt that his prediction was a quite unconscious reminiscence

of Mrs. Barbauld ; she too had foretold the day when some visitor,

> From the Blue Mountains or Ontario's Lake,

might curiously trace the crumbling turrets and the broken stairs of London,

> And choked no more with fleets, fair Thames survey
> Through reeds and sedge pursue his idle way.

Of Mrs. Barbauld's prose essays, mainly didactic, and often clothed in fable or allegory, little needs to be said save that they everywhere show her moral good sense and insight. In some matters, indeed, she would not satisfy the intellectual yearnings of her sex in the present day as to female culture. A proposal to start a ladies' college, over which she should preside, found no favour in her eyes. Although herself brought up with some knowledge of the ancient classics, she regarded herself as no rule for others—a kind of "freak," as it were, and the mere creature of circumstances. The duties of the home and the sick-room seemed to her quite sufficient for the average girl. But on the larger question of what Education is, as distinguished from Instruction, and as to those early years when the child is influenced by what Thomas Hood wittily called "Impressions before the Letters," her teaching was admirably sound. Her Essay entitled "Education," in which she warns the father that his child's character will inevitably be formed by what he sees and notes in the parent and in his

surroundings, and not by what the parent tells him to be and do, involves counsel that can never be obsolete. "You," she says, "that have toiled during youth to set your son upon higher ground, and to enable him to begin where you left off, do not expect that son to be what you were—diligent, modest, active, simple in his tastes, fertile in resources. You have put him under quite a different master. Poverty educated *you*, wealth will educate *him*."

One other essay may be referred to because it marks, almost pathetically, a breaking away from the severely philosophical principles of her co-religionists, and caused many weepings over her defection. It is the one entitled "Thoughts on the Devotional Taste." She here pleads for the admission into the forms of Divine Worship of some little element of the emotional and the sentimental, and even has a word to say for that offence which in the days following Wesley and Whitefield had almost come, even with devout Anglicans, to be regarded as the unpardonable sin—that of enthusiasm. "Let us not," she finely says, "be superstitiously afraid of superstition." But her warning fell upon unprepared ground. This very moderate and humble plea was so little satisfactory to her niece and biographer, that Miss Aikin found herself compelled to note that "the piece betrays, it must be confessed, that propensity to tread on dangerous ground which sometimes appears an instinct of genius."

Mrs. Barbauld's life was prosperous, as it was useful and honoured. But she had one great sorrow. Her marriage was surely one of affection, but was hardly prudent. Mr. Barbauld had early shown symptoms which pointed to brain-trouble, in the form of a morbid irritability. Mrs. Barbauld seems to have been forewarned of this, but she flattered herself that her love and care would overcome these tendencies. But they deepened and darkened with years until they ended in chronic mania. Moreover, she had no children, and the little "Charles" of the *Early Lessons* was an adopted nephew, the son of her brother, Dr. Aikin. Yet the married life in its earlier days had its bright and happy moments. Some verses addressed to her husband, when just four years had passed, I shall be forgiven for quoting, for like all her poems, save one, they have passed out of our ken, and even from the anthologies. The date of the poem, which heads it, was probably Mr. Barbauld's birthday. It was certainly not his wife's, nor their wedding day. The lines show the grace and playfulness and more than the tenderness of Matthew Prior.

TO MR. BARBAULD

November 14, 1778

Come, clear thy studious looks awhile,
'Tis arrant treason now
To wear that moping brow
When I, thy empress, bid thee smile.

What though the fading year
One wreath will not afford
To grace the poet's hair,
Or deck the festal board;

A thousand pretty ways we'll find
To mock old Winter's starving reign;
We'll bid the violets spring again,
Bid rich poetic roses blow,
Peeping above his heaps of snow;
We'll dress his withered cheeks in flowers,
And on his smooth bald head
Fantastic garlands bind:
Garlands which we will get
From the gay blooms of that immortal year,
Above the turning seasons set,
Where young ideas shoot in Fancy's sunny bowers.

A thousand pleasant arts we'll have
To add new feathers to the wings of Time,
And make him smoothly haste away:
We'll use him as our slave,
And when we please we'll bid him stay,
And clip his wings, and make him stop to view
Our studies, and our follies too;
How sweet our follies are how high our fancies climb.

We'll little care what others do,
And where they go, and what they say;
Our bliss, all inward and our own,
Would only tarnished be by being shown.
The talking restless world shall see,
Spite of the world we'll happy be;
But none shall know
How much we're so,
Save only Love, and we.

The Barbaulds left Hampstead in 1802, and removed to Stoke Newington in order to be near

her brother, Dr. Aikin, who had given up his London practice and settled there in 1798. Still full of energy in spite of growing anxieties as to her husband's health, she achieved an excellent piece of editorial work in the Correspondence, with Memoir, of Samuel Richardson.

Crabb Robinson first made her personal acquaintance in 1805, and describes her (she was then in her sixty-third year) as bearing "the remains of great personal beauty. She had a brilliant complexion, light hair, blue eyes, a small elegant figure, and her manners were very agreeable, with something of the generation then departing." Her husband ended "that long disease, his life," in 1808. Her brother died in 1822, and she herself survived three years longer, dying at the age of eighty-two, on the 9th of March 1825.

A memorable and admirable woman was Anna Letitia Barbauld. Within her limits she was many-sided. She was a poetess with a real sense of metrical charm, but with many indications that she was held back by some invisible force from pressing into the kingdom of poetry that was growing up around her. She could never quite resist the influences of the eighteenth century, though the nineteenth was dawning at her feet. Her theology, or the absence of any, causes her devotional writings, hymns in prose or verse, to strike us as tepid and ineffectual, in despite of her truly reverential nature. She never was

wholly weaned from the idolatry of common-sense, though she felt, as we have seen, the weak side of the religious conceptions among which she had grown up. But in an age of frivolity and dissipation in high life, she set up noble standards and lived by them herself, and more than one generation of children has had reason to call her blessed.

THE CHILDREN'S BOOKS OF A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

THE *Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, not many years since given for the first time to the public, have afforded, I have no doubt, to many a real delight, whether or no they came to the book as readers and admirers of her numerous works of fiction. Her charming personality—a mind and nature so well balanced; such good sense, good feeling, kindliness, and humour; all exhibited on a stage of domestic life that must have been full of difficulties and stumbling-blocks —must always be a pleasant subject of contemplation. But with all her achievements and excellences it is doubtful if she ever did better and more enduring work than in that once famous series of children's books which too many of us know only vaguely by name, as *Rosamond*, *Frank, Harry and Lucy*, and the *Parent's Assistant*. If I had addressed such an audience as the present thirty years ago, I might safely have assumed that every educated person of middle age had been "brought up" on some or other of

these books, and that the names of the chief personages therein remained with them as "household words." But I grieve to say that often now when I cite the once honoured names of *Lazy Lawrence* and *Simple Susan* I am met with a countenance of painful astonishment and non-recognition.

The first volume of Maria Edgeworth's stories for children (containing amongst others *Rosamond and the Purple Jar*) appeared more than a hundred years ago. Those who have read the *Life and Letters* will remember the origin of these stories. Miss Edgeworth had a father—an amiable and admirable man of considerable ability and untiring energy, to whom she was devoted, and with reason, for (with slight abatements) he was an excellent husband and father. His conjugal history has a humorous side, as such things are apt to have when the chief actor, like Richard Lovell Edgeworth, is all but destitute of a sense of humour. He was one of those profoundly influenced by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and especially by the new ideas of education propounded in that writer's *Émile*. This work forms the key to Richard Edgeworth's philosophy generally. He took his eldest son abroad to bring him up after the doctrines of Rousseau; and when it was discovered that his daughter Maria possessed the unmistakable gift of narration (she had practised the art regularly on her schoolfellows), it occurred to him how, in

the important work of education, stories about young people for young people might be made a means of teaching the coming generation the great doctrines of the French reformer—an education based, as he believed, on the principles of common-sense and pure reason, inculcating temperance, industry, justice, benevolence, and home discipline as the road to all excellence and happiness. And it was he, doubtless, in the first instance, who suggested the methods and furnished the moral topics of his daughter's little books. In the earlier stories the father and daughter were in fact partners, and the prefaces were often signed with their joint initials.

The credit of originating the moral story for the young cannot be claimed for Richard Lovell Edgeworth. The influence of the new ideas which had been at work in France, culminating in the French Revolution, had already borne fruit widely in European societies; and the influence of Rousseau had distinctly affected children's literature before the Edgeworths began to write. Moral tales for the young were abundant at the time the Edgeworths began their labours, and had evidently been found to supply a real want. In 1792, for instance, I find already in a third edition a collection of stories translated from the German of Salzmann, written with the express purpose, as the preface announces, of giving birth 'to what we call a good disposition in children" —such good disposition meaning, in the writer's

view, "a superior degree of knowledge," whereby the child, viewing in human example the sad results of idleness or envy or dissipation, may learn how to avoid these vices. No attempt in preface or title-page is made to disguise the real object of these short histories. Anything more heartlessly unattractive than the title-page of these volumes was assuredly never put into type —"Elements of Morality for the Use of Children; with an introductory Address to Parents. Translated from the German of the Rev. C. G. Salzmann." Dreary and mawkish as are these histories of naughty or erring children, they seem to have been popular, and to have prompted many like histories of native growth. Two years later, in 1794, appeared, by an estimable attorney's wife, "The Two Cousins: a Moral Story for the use of Young Persons, in which is exemplified the necessity of Moderation and Justice to the attainment of Happiness." In this story the country-bred daughter, leading a life of obedience and contentment, is made to put to shame the spoiled fine-lady cousin from town. Here the badge of Rousseau is actually worn upon the sleeve by the lady author, who introduces a passage in French from that author and translates it into English for the benefit of her readers. So that Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his daughter were only following a strong and proved leading of the time in regarding moral fiction as an important part of the education of children. Had the father

been left to himself in this task, however moral his aims, he might have been long forgotten, like those dreary predecessors of which I have just given samples. Happily, he allied himself with a daughter whose invention, humour, and fancy were to do so much to neutralise the depressing rationality of her parent. One other influence (nearer home) had been at work, in the first instance, upon the father and daughter—that of Thomas Day, Richard Lovell Edgeworth's dearest friend, and the ingenious author of *Sandford and Merton*, a gentleman who might be defined as a Rousseau run silly, and who "muddled" his existence generally by preposterous fads. He selected two workhouse girls for education on Rousseau-like principles, intending to marry whichever turned out best, and then married neither; and concluded his ill-starred existence by attempting (for Nature's sake) to ride an unbroken colt without saddle or bridle! The first joint effort of the father and daughter appeared in 1796—a single volume containing, amongst other stories, the *Purple Jar* and *Lazy Lawrence* (Miss Edgeworth afterwards separated these, placing the *Purple Jar* in the *Rosamond* series, to which it clearly belongs). Now the *Purple Jar* has attained a notoriety which has perhaps unduly injured the reputation of its many successors in the same kind.

The *Purple Jar* reflects the parent Edgeworth's lack of humour in its ghastliest shape.

You will remember how poor Rosamund, aged seven, whose shoes are sadly out of repair, attracted by the sight of a radiant vessel in a chemist's window, and coveting its possession, is allowed by her mother to choose (there being apparently only one spare half-guinea available) between the jar and a new pair of shoes, the mother being at the time quite aware that the jar was a fraud, and would not serve the purpose for which the child desired it. In this story the hand of the father is unmistakable—the most reprehensible mother being simply Richard Lovell Edgeworth in petticoats. Her course of proceeding seemed to him (we cannot doubt) a proud vindication of pure reason against maudlin sentiment. There is a couplet of Pope's which seems not inopportune :—

> There are whom Heaven has blest with store of wit,
> Yet need as much again to manage it.

This is equally true of that rarer faculty, common-sense. Richard Lovell Edgeworth had a fair share of it, only he sadly wanted at least as much again to prevent its making a fool of itself.

However, happily, as time went on the genius of the daughter proved too strong for the disciplinary theories of such a moral martinet as her father. He fell out of the firm by degrees, or became a sleeping partner ; and then followed in due succession the admirable series, carefully graduated according to the age of the intended reader—the series relating the ways and the doings

of *Frank and Robert*, of *Rosamond and Laura*, of *Harry and Lucy*, and that miscellaneous collection known to us as the *Parent's Assistant*, including those beloved friends of our childhood, *Lazy Lawrence* and *Simple Susan*, *Barring-out*, the *Basket Woman*, *Waste not Want not*, the *Mimic*, and *Old Poz*.

Now we are given to understand by many critics of the present day that Maria Edgeworth falls short of the highest merit as a story-teller from the fact that her tales are so generally tales "with a purpose." It has come to be regarded almost as an axiom that fiction is necessarily spoiled or lowered by being thus written; that is to say, to instil certain moral lessons, or to propagate certain opinions, or, in fact, with any *arrière pensée* at all, except the claims of art (as we understand it). You may *amuse* in your fiction, and I need not add at the present juncture, that you may horrify and disgust at your own sweet will, but you must on no account *edify*. And, in truth, if any prejudice has grown up in these days against stories with a purpose, there may be some excuse for it. When novels are so often either sermons, or philosophical treatises, or blue-books in disguise; and when persons with no genius and no humour, but only a good deal of culture and some literary skill, compose these works, we find them dreary reading, no doubt, and straightway perhaps lay the blame of it upon the subject, instead of upon the writer. When

the subject, or object, or both, are everything, no wonder that boredom sets in early. For the "purpose," under these circumstances, is always protruding from under what ought to be character-drawing, construction, humour, pathos, the very flesh and blood which ought to constitute the real body and the real attractiveness of the work. As the sarcastic policeman observed to the cabman, in John Leech's picture, "Hullo! Cabby, I see you're going to have a new 'orse." "A new 'oss! 'ow do you mean?" "Well, I see you've got the framework ready!" Yes, when the framework is the chief thing visible, the result is indeed depressing. But I take the real truth to be that every novel or story, to be worth anything, *is* written with a purpose—a purpose very clear and real in the mind of the writer. I believe the biggest men in fiction have always had a purpose, and cherished it to the end—some moral or lesson which they wished should be drawn, or, at least, felt. Depend upon it, Henry Fielding and W. M. Thackeray had lessons in their minds to teach—differing, doubtless, according to the lights and the moral standpoints of the writers—when they wrote *Tom Jones* and *Vanity Fair—only*, they happened to be Fielding and Thackeray, and the world has been too grateful to think of complaining, or even remarking, upon the circumstance. But indeed it is rather late to begin complaining. From the earliest ages of civilisation fiction and moral purpose have gone hand-in-hand. The Parable, and

the Fable, and the Proverb,—what are these but fiction with a purpose "written small," and what does not the current morality of the world, yes, and the conscience of the world, owe to these homely ethical admonishers? Well, let us admit that Maria Edgeworth, especially at first, when papa was always looking over her shoulder, did write her purpose in letters too staring. Madame de Staël, we are told, remarked about her, after reading some of her *Tales of Fashionable Life*, "Vraiment, Miss Edgeworth est digne de l'enthousiasme, mais elle se perd dans votre triste utilité." The exceptional presence of the *utilité* in many of her stories cannot be gainsaid; but in her children's books, at least, we must utterly deny the *tristesse*. How little (*too* little, some people might even allege!) of the *triste* was there in that generous, humorous, and happy nature. Call to mind that inimitable and, in my judgment, to this day unrivalled collection of stories called by the uninviting name of the *Parent's Assistant*. The *Parent's Friend* Miss Edgeworth would have preferred, but her publisher was inexorable. I almost fear (as I have said) that even the name of this series is unknown to many middle-aged persons in this day. And how great, I would remark, is their loss. Every one of these stories, I am sure, has a moral, but only here and there is it obtruded at all. Now and again it appears in the title, and, after all, what harm is done in giving the title of *Waste not Want not* to that delightful narrative

of the two young archers, and the archery meeting, and Lady Di; and that noble piece of whipcord, "well saved," which appears from Ben's pocket at the crisis of his fate to enable him to make the triumphant shot. I am sure I have not read this story for forty years, but the exhilaration of it—the life, the breezy air of the downs, the keen human interest of it—live for me to this day. And what if it *is* "marred" by having a moral purpose—and a maxim at the head of it? After all, it is but an early instance of that charming thing the French call a *Proverbe*,—which a De Musset has made immortal in "Il ne faut jurer de rien," or "On ne badine pas avec l'amour." I am certain that as a child I was not offended or disturbed by the admixture of this moral powder with the currant jelly. Happily, children do not regard their fiction from the standpoint of the high-art critic; but I am sure that in this story, and in all of the same series, the invention and the tact and the saving gift of humour of the writer reduce all such objections to an absurdity.

How good they all are, how fresh and how various, and how (surest test of all) they live in the memory of those brought up among them—if only for the blessed reason that such books in our childhood were few and excellent, instead of being multitudinous and mediocre. I undertake to say that those who remember these stories, remember them not as names, but as pictures indelibly impressed upon their imaginations, and

as lessons which have become part of their stock of moral wisdom. I remember, many years ago, breakfasting in company with Dean Stanley at the house of my friend and predecessor Dr. Vaughan, and of setting him off at once by the mention of Miss Edgeworth, whose story of *Simple Susan* we straightway proceeded to recall alternately in successive incidents—the blind harper and his boy; little Susan and "take a poon, pig!" Sir Arthur and the vulgar attorney; that ill-regulated Miss Bab and the overturned bee-hive. And did not a greater than Dean Stanley, Sir Walter Scott, remark of the same touching history that when the boy brought home Susan's pet lamb, "there was nothing for it but to cry"?

And to those who read and re-read these stories, as children's books *were* read in those days, how many others will remain ineffaceable from memory! The basket woman, with the honest children who "skidded" the wheels of the gentleman's coach and received a guinea instead of a shilling by mistake; *Barring-out*, with the majestic Dr. Middleton, and Fisher with the bag of *twelve buns*, in itself a delightful picture for the childish imagination; Tarleton, and the "False Key," with that wicked cook who exchanged "delicate cold turkey" for the cherry brandy of the wicked butler; and the exquisite story of the *Orphans*, who earned so admirably the long-desired boon of the "slated house." What variety

there was in these stories; what freshness of invention; what a rare power of striking what one may call the moral imagination; and, unlike the sermon of the sheriff's chaplain, so brief, and yet never tedious!

In my retrospect this evening, I am choosing typical representatives of a change that was coming over the child's library, and I have therefore to pass over many other interesting contributions to it belonging to the period in question. Some among the more elderly of my readers will recall some such, and perhaps feel a pang to find them unmentioned. Some will remember the *Looking-Glass for the Mind*, which was, however, French, not English, for it was a translation of parts of Berquin's *Ami des Enfans;* and many, I hope, would regret if I did not make even barest mention of Charles and Mary Lamb's two memorable children's books, the *Tales from Shakspeare*, and the *Poetry for Children.* All generations since have owed a mighty debt to the former of these; and the latter has a peculiar interest in that, as far as I am aware, it was the first compliment ever paid to children, in recognising that poetry (as distinguished from nursery rhymes) had a mission for children at all. The verses of Charles and Mary are of very varying degrees of merit (*qua* poetry), but at their best they are full of sweet felicities and ingenuities, and for those familiar with earlier poets, are ever recalling the art of

Gay, or Prior, or Wither. And this circumstance might well place them in a corner apart—a pleasant back-water, away from the flowing stream, were it not that the effect of that stream is clearly shown in this, that these charming fancies are (four-fifths of them) *instructive*, having their moral written on their very sleeve—the moral of meekness, and brotherly love, and obedience and modesty; the folly of envy, and conceit, and thoughtless cruelty—all serving to show how strongly the tide was setting in for something more sober and more earnest than the outgoing *Tommy Trips* and *Goody Two-Shoes* of Mr. Newbery's large collection. But as yet, for the most part, though children's literature had reflected strongly the influence of the new spirit, born of the French Revolution, in the glorification of pure reason, and the quickened sense of the dignity of human nature, yet two other spirits already working elsewhere had not as yet entered into and leavened that literature. I mean the Evangelical movement, which itself of course grew out of the work of Wesley and his companions, and the new opening of the eyes of Poetry to the light and life that lives in a first-hand study of Nature—that movement which came, not "at one stride" (like the dark in the *Ancient Mariner*), but gradually and untraceably, like the dissolving views of our "Polytechnic" days—struggling against the fetters of the old Popian diction in Thomson and

Cowper, appearing first in unsullied glory in Burns, from whom in turn Wordsworth rejoiced to have borrowed and carried on the torch, for was it not Burns who taught his youth—

> How verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth!

But there was now to appear a writer, or rather two writers, for children, on whom this double influence of the poetic renascence of the first years of the century and the spiritual revival bequeathed by the Wesleys was to be distinctly shown. I mean the two sisters, Ann and Jane Taylor, authors of the *Original Poems for Infant Minds*, the first series of which appeared in 1804. The daughters of one Isaac Taylor, an engraver, destined to be the father of a second Isaac Taylor, of considerable mark as theologian and thinker, the girls lived a happy and profitable country life in Essex, with "engraving" as their study, but literature as their real bent, began writing verse for one of the many popular annuals or "pocket-books" of that day, and so attracted the attention of the publishers, who proposed to them to write "moral songs" or "easy poetry for young children."[1] Hence the *Original Poems* just named;—if to be judged by their vitality, more remarkable than any classics

[1] [The publishers' letter to Isaac Taylor, signed "for self and partner, very respectfully, Darton and Harvey," is given in the Introduction to the Centenary edition of the *Original Poems*, edited by E. V. Lucas (Wells Gardner, Darton and Co.).]

of the nursery yet mentioned—perhaps because designed more exclusively for the *nursery* than their predecessors, being for children of a tenderer age. It is more difficult to suggest even plausible fresh substitutes for such infantile lyrics as "Twinkle, twinkle, little star!" or "Thank you, pretty cow, that made pleasant milk to soak my bread," than for the *Parent's Assistant* of Miss Edgeworth. To write well for the nursery—to be simple and yet not mawkish, poetical and yet enjoyable to the full by the child-mind—is harder than to write for that next stage, the schoolroom. And the Taylors had mastered this rare and difficult art. Their own studies had lain in the direction of simplicity and purity of diction. Their poetic masters had been Cowper (notably, I think), Wordsworth, and Blake. Where, indeed, the two sisters are baldly didactic, where the moral purpose forbids much dedication to the unfettered muse, their merit is simply that of brisk narrative, ending generally in some startling Nemesis. The mad bull who gored the little boy for asking questions, a legend which that "little infidel" Paul Dombey demurred to entertain (having based his objection, you remember, on the alleged lunacy of the bull), appears too often in these poems as a *Deus ex machina*. The little angler, who catches his own chin on a hook in the kitchen dresser; the embryo dandy, who, being over-proud of his new suit of clothes, comes to condign grief by contact

with the chimney-sweep,—these will be familiar memories to us all. But such freaks as these do not make the real essence of the book. It is the little lyrics interspersed calling attention to the common sights of heaven and earth, of garden and field, of the varying seasons—lyrics resembling Wordsworth, and even more resembling Blake; and though they never show that touch of genius which now and again lifts Blake into the highest heaven of poetic beauty, they also are supremely sane, and never dwindle away into mystic riddles. Listen to this, so direct and so simple, so based on first-hand observation of Nature :—

THE MICHAELMAS DAISY

I am very pale and dim
With my faint and bluish rim;
Standing on my narrow stalk
By the littered gravel walk.
And the withered leaves aloft
Fall upon me very oft.

But I show my lonely head
When the other flowers are dead.
And you're even glad to spy
Such a homely thing as I;
For I seem to smile, and say
"Summer is not quite away."

Wordsworth or Blake could not better that. It is as perfect (which is saying much) as Lord Tennyson's "What does little Birdie say, in his

bed at break of day?" And there are a dozen others as perfect in feeling and sincerity, which is but another way of saying perfect in "charm." Here, too, we come upon the most famous of all infantile lyrics, the stanzas to "My Mother," obviously suggested by Cowper's to "My Mary," and in their kind hardly less musical and tender.

> Who fed me from her gentle breast,
> And hushed me in her arms to rest,
> And on my cheek sweet kisses prest?
> My Mother.

Doubtless in this poem, as in others, little crudities of Calvinistic theology may just peep, crocus-like, above the soil; and doubtless in other of the verses modern political economy might suggest important modifications. An acquaintance of mine was fond of suggesting that a new edition of the *Original Poems* might be prepared in more accord (for instance) with the principles of the Charity Organisation Society, and flippantly proposed that "little Ann and her mother," who walked, you remember, in Cavendish Square, should end their adventure thus—

> 'I'm ashamed of you, Ann," said her parent so kind,
> "Yon beggar is clearly a cheat;
> And your blue-books will tell you you ought to be fined
> If e'er you give alms in the street."

But after all, perhaps, there is an *order* in a child's education, and the duty and blessedness

of charity[1] may well precede the consideration of how best to preserve its administration from danger of abuse. The mainspring takes precedence in importance of the regulator. In the same way one should properly demur to a similar proposed alteration in one of Ann Taylor's best known *Hymns for Infants*. For I trust that as yet we need not require such infants to return thanks to Providence,

> Who made them in post-Christian days,
> A happy School-Board child.

However, this is a digression. What I wish to point out with regard to Ann and Jane Taylor is that they were no exception to the rule that whenever "little things" (or what pass for such with the unthinking) do the work intended for them, and thus live in men's memory and affection, it is because their authors come to the task from a higher ground. They do the little things so well because they *can* do greater ones. There was the true poetic feeling (rarest of all poetical gifts) in these two women, besides that gift which

[1] [But there is no lesson of charity in this poem. Neither Ann nor her mother proposes to relieve the beggar. Having overheard her pitiful story the mother moralises as follows :—

> This poor little beggar is hungry and cold,
> No mother awaits her return ;
> And while such an object as this you behold,
> Your heart should with gratitude burn.
>
> Your house and its comforts, your food and your friends
> 'Tis favour in God to confer ;
> Have you any claim to the bounty He sends?
> Who makes you to differ from her ?]

so often goes with it, the saving sense of humour. I wonder if many of my hearers ever even heard of the "Squire's Pew" of Jane Taylor, a poem which Archbishop Trench (an excellent critic) did not disdain to include in his anthology, the *Household Book of English Poetry*. The thought is the old, old thought of the transitoriness of human life, and the pathos of its contrast with the old, old surroundings—the subject, that is to say, is as hackneyed as that of Gray's *Elegy*—and though the writer has no command of Gray's magic, she has got the atmosphere and the tone, the "feeling" in a word, which is the secret of all charm.

A slanting ray of evening light
Shoots through the yellow pane—
It makes the faded crimson bright,
And gilds the fringe again;
The window's gothic framework falls
In oblique shadows on the walls.

And since those trappings first were new
How many a cloudless day,
To rob the velvet of its hue,
Has come, and passed away!
How many a setting sun hath made
That curious lattice-work of shade!

And then the poetess speaks of the courtly knight and his family who worshipped there "when the First James was King," and now they are to be seen only in the sculptured effigies, in "marble hard and cold"—

Outstretched together are exprest
He and my lady fair,
With hands uplifted on the breast
In attitude of prayer:
Long-visaged, clad in armour, he—
With ruffled arm and bodice, she.

Set forth in order as they died
Their numerous offspring bend,
Devoutly kneeling side by side
As if they did intend
For past omissions to atone
By saying endless prayers in stone.

How perfect is this in its kind—with that perfection that never grows old, or old-fashioned! And unlike, *radically* unlike, as were those three notable groups of writers for the young that I have brought before you this evening, yet there is just this supreme bond of union, that they were all considerable people, outside the work of this kind; that they could boast of more than the very best intentions, they brought something like genius to their task—and because their work was good, not merely "goody-goody," they impressed themselves on the generation they wrote for, and for many after it.

Two qualities, indeed, we have found common to this group of writers;—something of the poet's imagination and creative power, and a strong conviction working with it (which may fairly be called "utilitarian") that for minds and natures in process of forming and training, the combination

of fiction or legend with moral teaching was wholesome and necessary. Whether fervent Dissenter or placid Deist, this was their common conviction, and they wrote accordingly. Hundreds and thousands of contemporaries and successors followed suit, and doubtless a surfeit of these (and when they *are* mawkish they are mawkish with a vengeance!) has sickened nurseries and schoolrooms, and provoked clever writers (of very different order of genius) to try to supply a different literature for the schoolroom, which shall at least not be "goody-goody." But here we must not forget yet a third peculiarity in our writers well worth noting. The striking success of the Aikins, the Edgeworths, and the Taylors was due largely, I think, to *this* —that they wrote for the young without any reservation, any *arrière pensée* whatever. There is a story of Heinrich Heine that gives us a useful parallel here. Heine used to say that whenever a woman wrote a book (and of course that was a rarer thing in his day than ours), she wrote with one eye on her manuscript and another on a *man*. He excepted (so he said) the Countess Hahn-Hahn, who had only one eye! Now I would not have soiled my lips with this very objectionable remark had it not supplied me, as I have said, with just the image that I want. The fault of some of the most famous children's books of our time is that their clever authors have written with one eye on the *child*

and the other on the *grown-up person*—in fact, on you and me! I am not speaking now of those beautiful tales *about* children, which are not meant for *their* reading at all, I hope—such as Miss Montgomery's *Misunderstood*, or the exquisite sketches of child-life by the late Mrs. Ewing—*Jackanapes*, and the *Story of a Short Life*, and the rest. But I am thinking of such masterpieces in their way as Charles Kingsley's *Water-Babies*, and Mr. Dodgson's *Alice in Wonderland*. You will not, I am certain, suspect me of questioning the genius and the charm of such works; but however they may contain elements fitted to engage the attention of the child, it is the *grown-up intellect* and the *grown-up sense of humour* that alone is capable of enjoying them to the full, or any degree near it. Even that delightful humourist, and master of so many styles, whose loss the whole English-speaking race is still mourning, Robert Louis Stevenson, when he writes his fascinating verses for children, has still (it cannot be overlooked) his beaming eye upon those who will enjoy his pleasant satire at the child's expense. Curiously enough, both he and Ann Taylor have written about the "pretty cow." We all remember *her* first stanza:—

> Thank you, pretty cow, that made
> Pleasant milk to soak my bread
> Every day, and every night,
> Warm and fresh and sweet and white.

Now hear Louis Stevenson :—

> The friendly cow, all red and white,
> I love with all my heart—
> She gives me cream with all her might
> To eat with apple-tart.

Is there no *arrière pensée* here? "She gives me cream with all her might." Are we not sure, as sure as if he had publicly confessed the fact, that the gentle humourist was winking that other eye of his at Mr. Sidney Colvin, and Mr. Andrew Lang, and all whom he loved so well? And it is because (in my opinion, at least) burlesque, and satire, and humour (of the intellectual sort) are inestimable things, but their proper place is later than the nursery and the schoolroom, therefore I hold that the writers for children of a hundred years ago did a work, and supplied a want (which never grows old), which these far cleverer and more brilliant writers do not supply.

Once more I say that I am sure you will not suspect me of underrating the imaginative and the fanciful and the playful, and even the humorous, as elements (absolutely necessary elements) in the education of the child. But there are various kinds even of these things; and we ought to observe that natural order which we respect without question in other fields of intellectual or æsthetic training. We do not feed our poetical youth upon Browning and Shelley before they have formed an ear and a taste upon Scott and

Gray and Goldsmith; we do not let our young pianists tackle Brahms and Liszt till their ears have been well saturated with the jocund Haydn and the pellucid Mozart. And therefore, after a hundred years, I devoutly wish Miss Edgeworth and Mrs. Barbauld could be restored to our nursery book-shelves. Mammas have indeed said to me sometimes, "My children will not *look at* Miss Edgeworth," and only good manners have prevented my retorting, "Yes! but what had they been fed upon beforehand?" for even brown bread and butter is apt to be insipid after a surfeit of chocolate-creams and hard-bake. After the gaudy hot-pressed, profusely illustrated, smartly bound children's books of to-day, a new one every month, when each is just tasted and then thrown away, it may be hard to make the little patient believe that it is the few books, got well into the system by reading over and over again, that educate in any worthy sense.

No doubt in the season of the Rousseau influence (all violent reactions having their silly side) much nonsense was talked about the unfitness of fairy tales, fables, and the like for the young mind, as not bearing the test of Nature and pure reasonableness. Rousseau himself (one of whose chief defects was that of a sense of humour) demurred to these as injurious to a child's sense of truth. That fascinating and forgotten humourist, the poet Cowper (himself a distinct product of the Rousseau influence, on

its happier side of a fresh and first-hand contemplation of man and nature), fortunately possessed this missing sense of the ludicrous. One of his own delightful fables is prefaced thus :—

> I will not ask Jean-Jacques Rousseau
> If birds confabulate, or no.
> 'Tis clear that they were always able
> To hold discourse, at least in fable ;
> And e'en the *child*, who knows no better
> Than to interpret by the letter
> A story of a cock and bull,
> Must have a most uncommon skull.

But I am afraid there were fanatics who for a while lost the fine common-sense thus delightfully expressed ;. and even dear Charles Lamb and his sister were provoked by it into thinking bitter thoughts of "Mrs. Barbauld's stuff," which (Lamb wrote to Coleridge) had "banished all the old classics of the nursery." But though Richard Edgeworth may have wished to do this, certainly Mrs. Barbauld did not ; and in *Evenings at Home* there is abundant proof that no such pedantry clung to the Aikins. And the pedantry, wherever found, did not last, except perhaps among the extremest puritans. The fads and follies of the Rousseau school died away, and the good remained, bearing admirable fruit for years to come. Mr. John Morley, in his thoughtful estimate of Rousseau's work and its influence, finds that influence, in England at least, "not very perceptible." I venture to differ here from

Mr. Morley, in the way I have tried to show this evening; but I am entirely with him when he says of *Émile* that it is one of the most fertilising books in the history of literature; and that "of such books the worth resides less in the parts than in the whole. It touched the deeper things of *character*. It filled parents with a sense of the dignity and moment of their task."[1] And it is because I think that such trifles as the pleasure-books of the nursery and schoolroom (like the proverbial straw when thrown aloft) show which way the wind blows in these *fin-de-siècle* days, when character is left so much to take care of itself, that I have hoped they were not too trivial even for the distinguished audience that gathers under this roof.

[1] [*Rousseau.* By John Morley, ii. 248.]

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